The conflict-resolving church : community and authority in the prophetic ecclesiology of John Howard Yoder.

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THE CONFLICT-RESOLVING CHURCH

COMMUNITY AND AUTHORITY IN THE PROPHETIC ECCLESIOLOGY OF JOHN HOWARD YODER

This Thesis is submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Abstract

This thesis asserts that central among defining activities of the Christian church is its peaceful resolution of conflicts. It consists of a systematic exposition and discussion of the ecclesiology of the Mennonite theologian, John Howard Yoder, in the light of contemporary work in the field. This enables the communal life of the church to be highlighted in relation to the function of authority within it.

The church may be characterized as a visible community of those whose specific allegiance is to Jesus Christ as Lord, an allegiance embodied in several specific practices. Central among these is conflict resolution, in which the community continues to enact the reconciling work of the Lord of the church, empowered by the action of God's Spirit, both among its members and beyond its boundaries.

The church is a community inhabiting a tradition rooted in its Jewish heritage. Yet historically, the church has largely separated itself from Judaism and allied itself with conventional political powers in the form of Christendom. The effect has been to marginalize the communal dimension of its ecclesiology and to authorise a series of monolithic organizations, characterized by oppressively hierarchical leadership structures.

Whilst minor elements of Yoder's critique of and alternative to these aberrations are vulnerable to attack, the author judges that his central contentions, concerning the need to return humbly to Jewish roots and to take the narrow path as a community of specific allegiance to Jesus Christ, constitute a prophetic call to the whole church. Further consideration of the development of leadership in the church in relation to household imagery leads to the author's own proposal that conflict resolution should be one of its leaders' prime concerns.

Contents

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I am grateful to Dr Brian Horne for his supervision of the research which has resulted in this dissertation. His knowledge of the Christian tradition and perceptive questions have kept me thinking about the central issues. An important aspect of study at King's College, London, has been the stimulation and encouragement of the members of the Research Institute in Systematic Theology. I also want to thank Robert Banks, until recently Professor of the Ministry of the Laity and Director of the De Pree Leadership Centre at Fuller Theological Seminary, for his friendship and counsel which contributed to my decision to embark on this project, for his advice at the beginning and continued interest in it.

I owe much to the staff at the London Mennonite Centre who have made available to me written material by John Yoder, some of it unpublished. I value the welcome into their community which I have received in the last five years. I am particularly grateful for friendship with Mark Thiessen Nation, Programme Director, and his wife Mary, Consultant in Urban Mission and Spirituality. I had just begun to correspond with John when I heard that he had died, so I have had to depend on Mark's extensive first hand knowledge of the man. He has shared with me his many insights, corrected biographical errors and enabled me to clarify a number of interpretive issues.

When I began my research my father and mother encouraged me with a gift which made a considerable contribution towards fees. Since my father's death in December 1996, my mother has continued to encourage me to finish my work. Throughout the changes of direction of my career in the last fourteen years my wife, Kathy, has been a true companion and listener. She has worked in a stressful job for many years at least partly so that I might pursue further qualifications. Together we have struggled with what makes for church, and I could not have reached this point without her.

Abbreviations and Reference Works

AARAS	American Academy of Religion Academy Series
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 volumes, ed. David Noel Freeman et al., (New York: Doubleday, 1992).
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
APSR	*The American Political Science Review*
B.C.E.	Before the Common Era
BSHP	*Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme*
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
C.E.	Common Era
CGR	*Conrad Grebel Review*
CH	*Church History*
CMMC	Christian Mission and Modern Culture
CRBS	*Currents in Research: Biblical Studies*
CRR	Classics of the Radical Reformation
DBI	*A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, edd. R. J. Coggins & J. L. Houlden (London: SCM Press, 1990).
DJG	*Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, edd. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, & I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove Ill. & Leicester: IVP, 1992).
DPL	*Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, edd. Gerald F. Hawthorn, Ralph P. Martin, & Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, Ill. & Leicester: IVP, 1993).
DLNT	*Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments*, edd. Ralph P. Martin & Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, Ill. & Leicester, IVP, 1997).

ECF	The Early Christian Fathers
EEC	*Encyclopaedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1998²).
ET	English Translation
GNC	*Good News Commentary*
HBT	*Horizons in Biblical Theology*
HeyJ	*Heythrop Journal*
ICC	*International Critical Commentary*
Int	*Interpretation*
IBC	INTERPRETATION: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
IBT	Interpreting Biblical Texts
ITC	International Theological Commentary
IVP	InterVarsity Press
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JES	*Journal of Ecumenical Studies*
JMS	*Journal of Mennonite Studies*
JRE	*Journal of Religious Ethics*
JSNTSS	Journal for the Society of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
MQR	*Mennonite Quarterly Review*
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NDCEPT	*New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, edd. David J. Atkinson & David H. Field (Leicester & Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1995).
NIB	*New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, edd. Leander Keck et al., (Nashville, Ten.: Abingdon Press, 1994 onwards).
NIDNTT	*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3 Vols. ed. Colin Brown (Exeter, Devon: Paternoster Press, 1975, 1976, 1978).

NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NTC	New Testament in Context
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OCTS	Outstanding Christian Thinkers Series
OTG	Old Testament Guides
SJT	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SNTW	Studies of the New Testament and Its World
SPCK	Society for the Progagation of Christian Knowledge
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, I-IX edd. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, ET G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964-74).
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentary
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentary
TPI	Trinity Press International
TS	*Theological Studies*
TSF	Theological Students Fellowship
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*

Note: In representing the tetragrammaton I have allowed some inconsistency when quoting sources in order to preserve authors' usage of either YHWH or Yahweh. In Biblical quotations I have employed the New Revised Standard Version (except where noted), but substituted YHWH for "the LORD." Inconsistencies occur for the same reason in the case of the first letter in "church." All quotations are as in the original works, thus any *emphases* are original unless otherwise noted.

1. Introduction

This chapter explains the author's reasons for undertaking this research. It introduces the reader to the work of John Howard Yoder and the style of his writing on ecclesiology. It reflects on the critical task of assessing it and maps the following chapters.

1.1 Explanation

I describe my intentions in undertaking this work, proceed to indicate its scope through a brief discussion of its title, and reflect on the terms involved.

1.1.1 Aim

This dissertation is the result of a quest for an ecclesiology which gives appropriate weight to the dimension of the church as a human community. It was undertaken by the author in the light of his experiences in Anglican parish ministry, out of which grew the perception that the nurturing of community is a low priority amongst many contemporary churches (of whatever denomination, at least in Britain). Alongside this perception has been the growing theological conviction that the healthy functioning of the local church as a community is of central importance to its life and witness. To raise theological awareness in this area would strengthen the life of the wider church and would improve relations between the various traditions of the Christian church. Kevin Giles, an Anglican, makes an observation about hermeneutics which has ecclesiological significance when he says that in the early days of the church

> The local gathering of Christians was important because this was where communal life in Christ was most personally realized; but for the early Christians, belonging to the one community established by Christ was the primary reality. The modern Western individualistic spectacles through which we read the early Christian Writings all too often blind us to seeing the profound communalism of early Christianity.[1]

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[1] Kevin Giles, *DLNT*, 195. Philip Abrams has rightly emphasised the power of individualism as an axiom

What ecclesiology, then, might enable churches to rediscover this sense of vital community?

It is important to emphasise from the start that my concern here is for a theological clarity which enables and encourages the practice of Christian community. Theology cannot simply be an intellectual pursuit, it is undertaken as a reflection upon life lived in response to God.[2] So ecclesiology is a reflection upon the life of the church, in the light of what we can know of God's will for the church. But ultimately what is required by the Christian church is that ecclesiology should be socially embodied through the power of God's Spirit.

My thinking about this subject had been stimulated during my time in Christian ministry in the late 1970s to mid 1980s by two innovative church practitioner-thinkers, Howard Snyder[3] and Robert Banks[4]. But I began my research by considering two

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of common sense knowledge in modern western civilisation. "Properly to appreciate the historical and sociological relationship of the individual and society we have, in my view, to make a determined effort to un-think dualism; to escape from the seductive clutches of the belief that the individual has a being distinct from that of society or, conversely, that society and the individual constitute separate realities. We have to try to convince ourselves that what we call individual and society are in fact aspects or phases of a unified human reality and not essentially distinct, let alone opposed, entities. Personally, although I find the call to abandon dualism (a call social scientists have been making to each other since the time of Marx) quite comprehensible, sensible and persuasive in principle, I must admit to finding it almost impossible to accomplish in practice. The weight of two and a half millennia of treating dualism as the obvious basis for effective thought is remarkably oppressive." *Historical Sociology* (Shepton Mallet, Somerset: Open Books, 1982), 227. I owe this reference to Tony McCutcheon.

[2] James Wm. McClendon has a helpful discussion of this in the first chapter of his *Doctrine: Systematic Theology, Vol. II* (Nashville, Ten.: Abingdon, 1994), especially 28-34.

[3] Howard Snyder, then Dean of the Free Methodist Theological Seminary, Sao Paulo, Brazil, presented a major paper entitled "The Church as God's Agent of Evangelism" at the International Congress on World Evangelization in 1974. This was published in J. D. Douglas (ed.) *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland, Official Reference Volume: Papers and Responses* (Minneapolis, Min.: World Wide Publications, 1975), 327-360. Many of his subsequent books explore the subject further: *The Problem of Wine Skins: Church Structure in a Technological Age* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1975); *The Community of the King* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1977); *The Radical Wesley and Patterns for Church Renewal* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1980); *Liberating the Church: The Ecology of Church & Kingdom* (Basingstoke, Hants.: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1983).

[4] Robert Banks, an Australian theologian and educator, gives much effort to the home church movement (he was formerly an Anglican clergyman). Of particular significance are his books *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in their Cultural Setting* (Exeter, Devon: Paternoster, 1980; revised edition, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994); *Going to Church in the First Century*, (Parramata, NSW: Hexagon Press, 1980). Robert & Julia Banks, *The Home Church: Regrouping the People of God for Community and Mission* (Tring, Herts.: Lion, 1986); revised edition, *The Church Comes Home* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1998).

renowned theologians who gave some attention to the church as community, Jürgen Moltmann[5] and Leonardo Boff.[6] I was encouraged, yet also dissatisfied with various aspects of their work. Subsequently I began to read the ecclesiological essays of John Howard Yoder and realised that I had not properly understood his well known ethical work before. In Yoder's challenge to a "profound intellectual reorientation"[7] I realised that I had come much closer to what I was looking for. After considering a comparison between the ecclesiologies of Yoder, Moltmann and Boff, I finally decided that Yoder's work on the church was so extensive and distinctive that it required to be treated on its own.

1.1.2 Thesis

I have chosen the title of this dissertation for several reasons. Firstly I want to emphasise the communal nature of the church and to show that Yoder's work gives this a central place. But I am aware that the use of the term "community" has almost become a cliché in theological circles, and is in need of further specification in order to speak meaningfully of the Christian church. If one conventional theological theme captures the message and life-style of Christianity it is reconciliation, but I shall claim that Yoder has given a particular edge to this in his emphasis upon the ecclesial practice of conflict resolution. In fact it is central to his ecclesiology, hence the headline, "The Conflict-Resolving Church." But my second intention in this work is to press the issue of the relation between community and authority in the church, a matter of current ecumenical

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[5] In particular, Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1977), and *The Open Church: Invitation to a Messianic Lifestyle*, trans. M. Douglas Meeks (London: SCM, 1978).

[6] In particular Leonardo Boff, *Church: Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church* (London: SCM, 1986), and *Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church*, trans. Robert R. Barr (London: Collins, 1986). Also significant are "Theological Characteristics of a Grassroots Church" in *The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities* edd. Sergio Torres & John Eagleson (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1981), 124-144 and "Is the distinction between *Ecclesia docens* and *Ecclesia discens* justified?" trans. Paul Burns in *Who Has the Say in the Church? Concilium* 148 (1981), 47-51.

[7] This is taken from the following: "New Testament moral thought begins by facing the fact that we live in a world that most of the time does not listen to all that Christians have to say and some of the time will listen to nothing. Recognition of this minority posture calls not for social cynicism or for withdrawal but for a profound intellectual reorientation." Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1994), 176.

debate stimulated by the desire for reunion between churches.[8] Throughout the following chapters, then, I work towards an examination of Yoder's controversial view on this subject in the penultimate chapter. I shall explain below (§1.2.3) that Yoder's theological writing is best understood as prophetic rather than systematic. These further considerations lead to my subheading, "Community and Authority in the Prophetic Ecclesiology of John Howard Yoder." The combination of the heading and subheading gives a hint of my own proposal, advanced in the last chapter, for the understanding and exercise of authority in the church: just as the Christian community is characterised by the practice of conflict resolution, so those who exercise authority within the community have a particular responsibility to practice conflict resolution.

1.1.3 Terms

"Community" and "authority" are imprecise terms, and I have contemplated attempting preliminary definitions of them. But I am aware that no neutral starting point in such matters can be assumed.[9] Yoder himself held that "There is no "scratch" to which one can go back to begin... What must replace the prolegomenal search for "scratch" is the confession of rootedness in historical community."[10] Every subject in theology is already under debate, and I shall introduce some aspects of current ecclesiological discussion in chapter 2. I shall present sufficient material from Yoder's contributions to these discussions for the reader to grasp his particular nuances of the terms "community" and "authority." At this stage I simply observe the significance of Yoder's attention to

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[8] This is not the place for a survey of current ecumenical work, but recent interchange in this area can be found in the papers prepared for the second consultation between representatives of the the World Evangelical Fellowship and of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity which took place 12-19 October 1997 at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute outside Jerusalem. These papers were published with an introduction by George Vandervelde in *Evangelical Review of Theology* 23:1 (1999).

[9] One sociological approach which shows a degree of theological openness can be found in Clark Cochran, "Authority and Community: The Contributions of Carl Friedrich, Yves R. Simon, and Michael Polanyi," *APSR*, Vol. 71 (1977), 546-558. I was alerted to this article by Arne Rasmussen's discussion of his work in relation to Stanley Hauerwas in *The Church as Polis: From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jürgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1994), 297f.

[10] Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 7.

"rootedness in historical community." We shall see that story and tradition are essential components of our subject.

1.2 Introducing John Howard Yoder

The object here is to orient the reader to the theological discussion of the following chapters. In order to provide an indication of the historical and theological context within which Yoder must be understood, I will provide a brief account of the Anabaptist tradition which even today is sometimes misrepresented.[11] There follows an overview of Yoder's life, work and influence. In the third subsection I discuss the character of his written work on ecclesiology and its implications for a synthetic presentation.

1.2.1 The Anabaptist Tradition

Modern scholarship has been able to disentangle the complexities of what has come to be known as the Radical Reformation from centuries of misunderstanding and opprobrium. In distinction from the magisterial Reformers, all parties within the Radical Reformation denied the state's authority in matters of faith and order.[12] It is now clear that within this broad category, the Anabaptists can be distinguished from several other groupings: spiritualists such as Caspar Schwenkfeld and Sebastian Franck, the evangelical rationalists (Michael Servetus, Juan de Valdes, Faustus Socinus), and also the libertines.[13]

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[11] Even such an established Reformation scholar as Alister McGrath misleads the beginning student in his acclaimed text book, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997²). He fails to employ the established distinction (see below) between the broad category "radical" and sub-category "Anabaptist" in his glossary (564) and historical overview (66), and seriously misrepresents the Anabaptist approach to Scripture (211, 221).

[12] The term "Radical Reformation" was established by George Huntston Williams in *The Radical Reformation* (Kirksville, MO.: Sixteenth Century Publishers, Inc., 1992³ {1962}).

[13] Debates continue about the relationship between Thomas Müntzer and the Anabaptists. For a discussion of these groupings, see Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 14-18. For a presentation of the emergence of Anabaptism within the wider radical reform, see Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener: Pandora, 1995), 25-49.

Anabaptism was itself a diverse movement[14] from its beginnings in 1523 when Conrad Grebel opposed Zwingli's appeal to the secular council of Zürich to settle church disputes.[15] For example, Balthasar Hübmaier, formerly a Catholic priest trained in scholastic theology and patristics, took a more positive attitude towards Christian participation in the state than did the Swiss brethren, led by Michael Sattler, formerly a Benedictine prior.[16] Again, Menno Simons, leader of Dutch Anabaptism for 25 years, held a view of the incarnation (Christ's physical nature was a new creation of the Holy Spirit within the body of Mary) which was controversial among other Anabaptists.

As in other oppressed minorities, the designation "Anabaptist" was adopted by the members of the movement from the insults of their opponents: they held that the practice of adult (or believer's) baptism, being the only true baptism, was essential to the life of the church. This was the consequence of understanding the church as a voluntary fellowship of those who experienced conversion, confessed their faith and accepted the discipline of a new way of life; baptism was the distinguishing mark of separation from the world and commitment to Christian discipleship. Those contemporary churches which adhere most closely to the Anabaptist tradition are the Mennonites, the Amish and the Hutterites.[17]

The Anabaptists did not do theology in the classical sense. This was partly because their leaders were from the beginning hunted down, imprisoned and executed; what time

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[14] The so-called polygenesis view of Anabaptist origins is now generally accepted; see Arnold Snyder, "Beyond Polygenesis: Recovering the Unity and Diversity of Anabaptist Theology," in H. Wayne Pipkin (ed.) *Essays in Anabaptist Theology* (Elkhart, Ind.: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1994), 1-33. For the latest discussion, which exposes the socio-historical meta-narrative of those who have sought to deconstruct any theological coherence in Anabaptism (and makes significant use of Yoder's historical work), see Thomas Heilke, "Theological and Secular Meta-Narratives of Politics: Anabaptist Origins Revisited (Again)," *Modern Theology*, 13:2 (April 1997), 227-252.

[15] See William Estep, *The Anabaptist Story: An Introduction to Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1996[3]), 15. The final rupture with Zwingli came on 21 January 1525, when the Zürich city council forbade the radicals to assemble or disseminate their views. That evening a dozen or so met in the village of Zollikon and baptised each other.

[16] That the differences between the various attitudes of Anabaptists to this issue should be understood in terms of their particular historical circumstances was proposed by Yoder in "Anabaptists and the Sword" Revisited: Systematic Historiography and Undogmatic Nonresistants," (*Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 85.2 (1974), 126-139.

[17] For the relationship of the Anabaptists to the older and wider believers' church tradition, see Donald Durnbaugh, *The Believers' Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald, 1985, {1968}).

for writing they found was given to advocating and defending key church practices. But they were also developing a theological focus of their own alongside and in reaction to the more systematic theology produced by magisterial Protestantism; it was largely an exposition of Biblical doctrine applied to the life of discipleship within the church. The Schleitheim Confession, probably drawn up in early 1527 by Michael Sattler, is in the genre of church manual: its articles concern baptism, excommunication, the Lord's Supper, separation from the world, pastors, the sword and the oath.[18]

With the recovery of Anabaptist history this century, there has developed a growing confidence and a body of work which articulates this distinctive theological approach. Perhaps the most sophisticated of these is the *Systematic Theology* of James William McClendon Jr.[19] The inspiration for this work is clearly Yoder's *Politics of Jesus*, and so we come to the main focus of this dissertation.

1.2.2 An Overview of Yoder's Life, Work and Influence

John Howard Yoder was born in 1927 and grew up in Ohio, USA.[20] He was reared in a Mennonite family and graduated from Goshen College (Mennonite) after just two years. He worked for Mennonite service organisations and seminaries for much of his career, yet his horizons were much wider than that denomination. After the Second World War he spent a number of years working and studying in Europe, and received his Th.D. from the University of Basel, Switzerland in 1962, at the time when Karl Barth was a prominent figure on the faculty.[21] On his return to the States he worked for the

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[18] It is significant that the Schleitheim Confession has been included in Mark A. Noll (ed.), *Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation* (Leicester: Apollos, 1991), 47-58.

[19] See James Wm. McClendon Jr., *Ethics: Systematic Theology, Volume I* (Nashville, Ten.: Abingdon, 1984), 7 and *Doctrine: Systematic Theology II* (Nashville, Ten.: Abingdon, 1994), 7. The final volume is nearing completion.

[20] Much fuller details of Yoder's life can be found in writings by Mark Thiessen Nation who has been appointed one of three executors of Yoder's literary estate. See "He Came Preaching Peace: The Ecumenical Peace Witness of John H. Yoder," *CGR*, Spring 1998, 65-76; and "John Howard Yoder, Ecumenical Neo-Anabaptist: A Biographical Sketch," in *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder* ed. Stanley Hauerwas et al., (Grand Rapids, Mi./ Cambridge: Eerdmans: 1999), 1-23.

[21] Yoder was not Barth's doctoral student (since his research was in the history of the Anabaptists), but he took many courses taught by this great theologian. Thus it was a mistake for David Michael Hughes to say that Yoder never studied directly under Barth, as quoted by Philip LeMasters, *The Import of Eschatology in John Howard Yoder's Critique of Constantinianism* (San Francisco, Mellen Research University Press,

Mennonite Board of Missions and became engaged in ecumenical contacts with Evangelical leaders and the National Council of Churches, and then the World Council of Churches. His theological teaching gradually became full-time in the 1960s and he was President of Goshen Biblical Seminary 1970-3. He also taught at the University of Notre Dame and became a full-time professor there in 1977,[22] where he remained until his death in December 1997. In the last few years of his life, Yoder underwent a painful church discipline process which was concluded with an endorsement of his teaching and writing.[23]

The key theological influence on Yoder was that of the sixteenth century Anabaptists. He was part of the twentieth century work of historical recovery of the Anabaptists, publishing historical analyses and translations of sources throughout his career.[24] But he is best known for his work on social ethics - a second edition of *The Politics of Jesus* appeared in 1994. His ethical work has been particularly influential for

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1992), 14n42. That Yoder found Barth a significant conversation partner whilst retaining his Mennonite position can be observed in *Karl Barth and the Problem of War* (Nashville, Ten.; Abingdon, 1970), and "Karl Barth: How His Mind Kept Changing," in *How Karl Barth Changed My Mind*, ed. Donald McKim (Grand Rapids, Mi.; Eerdmans, 1986), 166-171. Michael Cartwright has discussed Yoder's interaction with Barth in his introduction to Yoder's *The Royal Priesthood*, 16f. On Yoder's reception of Barth, see also Phillip R. Thorne, *Evangelicalism and Karl Barth: his reception and influence in North American Evangelical theology* (Allison Park, Pa.: Pickwick, 1995), 172-4.

[22] He continued to teach part-time at Goshen Biblical Seminary until 1984.

[23]"Disciplinary Process with Yoder Concludes," *Gospel Herald*, June 18, 1996, 11.

[24] Yoder's doctoral work led to the publication of two historical works on the Swiss Reformation, *Täufertum und Reformation in der Schweiz: I. Die Gespräche zwischen Täufern und Reformatoren 1523-1538*. (Karlsruhe: Verlag H. Schneider, 1962), and *Täufertum und Reformatoren im Gespräch: Dogmengeschichtliche Untersuchung der frühen Gespräche zwischen Schweizerischen Täufern und Reformatoren* (Zürich: EVZ-Verlag, 1968). From this doctoral work three essays in English on early Swiss Anabaptism were also derived; "The Turning Point in the Zwinglian Reformation," *MQR* 32 (April 1958), 128-40; "Balthasar Hubmaier and the Beginnings of Swiss Anabaptism," *MQR* 33 (January 1959: 5-17); "The Evolution of the Zwinglian Reformation," *MQR* 43 (January 1969, 92-122). Other published essays on the Anabaptists included "The Prophetic Dissent of the Anabaptists," in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision: A Sixtieth Anniversary Tribute to Harold S. Bender* ed. Guy F. Hershberger (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald, 1957), 93-104; "The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists," *MQR* 41 (Oct. 1967), 291-308; "'Anabaptists and the Sword' Revisited," (see above n16); "'Spirit' and the Varieties of Reformation Radicalism" in *De Geest in het geding* edd. I. B. Horst, A. F. DeJong & D. Visser (Alphen aan den Rijn: H. D. Tjeenk Willink, 1978), 301-306. Yoder translated and edited the works of two leading Anabaptists, *The Legacy of Michael Sattler*, CRR Vol. 1 (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald, 1973), and, with H. Wayne Pipkin, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, CRR Vol. 5 (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald, 1989). He also translated "How to Deal with Anabaptists: An Unpublished Letter of Heinrich Bullinger." *MQR* 33 (Jan. 1959), 83-95. It should be noted that Yoder's historical work has largely been ignored by the current generation of 16th C historical specialists, rather than directly challenged. Arnold Snyder has made a minor criticism in "Beyond Polygenesis," 32n46.

Stanley Hauerwas,[25] James William McClendon Jr.[26], and Richard Hays[27]. Jürgen Moltmann wrote the foreword to the German translation of *The Politics of Jesus*[28], and he refers to Yoder and accepts the Mennonite emphasis on the continuity between discipleship and Christian ethics in his *The Way of Jesus Christ.*[29] In addition, Yoder's understanding of theological method has been influential: whilst resistant to any particular methodological label, he could be associated with non-foundationalists.[30] He was fluent in French, German and Spanish which enabled him to lecture and teach in several parts of the world. His ecumenical work and wide-ranging speaking engagements gave the lie to the stereotype of believers' church withdrawal from wider society.[31]

1.2.3 Yoder's Written Output on Ecclesiology and the Synthetic Task

A comprehensive bibliography of Yoder's writings together with a list of studies of his work by others has been published by Mark Thiessen Nation.[32] My intention here is to give an indication of the range and style of Yoder's writing on ecclesiology, and to remark on their implications for my work.

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[25] Hauerwas has written appreciations of Yoder in "Messianic Pacifism" *Worldview* 16 (June 1973), pp29-33, "When the Politics of Jesus Makes a Difference." *Christian Century*, Oct. 13, 1993, 982-87 and "Reading Yoder Down Under." *Faith and Freedom: A Journal of Christian Ethics* 5 (June 1996), 39-41. Many of his books make reference to Yoder; e.g., *Vision and Virtue* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 197-221, and *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), especially 123-7.

[26] See n19 above.

[27] Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), esp. 291-6.

[28] Yoder, *Die Politik Jesu: der Weg des Kreuzes* trans. Wolfgang Krauss (Maxdorf: Agape Verlag, 1981).

[29] Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, trans. by Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1990), 116-9.

[30] See Yoder's "Walk and Word: The Alternatives to Methodologism" in *Theology Without Foundations: Religious Practice & the Future of Theological Truth* edd. Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy & Mark Nation (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 77-90. I discuss this aspect of his work in §3.4.1. For an example of Yoder's influence, see *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Postliberals in Conversation*, edd. Timothy R. Phillips & Dennis L. Ockholm (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1996); his name appears on pp63, 86, 92, 158, 177f, 249.

[31] Two of his key writings here were *The Christian Witness to the State* (Newton, Kan.: Faith and Life, 1964, footnotes slightly updated in the third printing, 1977), especially p71; and *For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1997), passim.

[32] Mark Thiessen Nation, *A Comprehensive Bibliography of the Writings of John Howard Yoder* (Goshen, Ind.: Mennonite Historical Society, 1997). He has more recently compiled further material, including everything major written up to Yoder's death (he notes that masses of papers, letters and memos remain to be sifted) in "Supplement to "A Comprehensive Bibliography of the Writings of John Howard Yoder,"" in *The Wisdom of the Cross*, 472-491.

Yoder did not publish a major work on the doctrine of the church. In fact, most of his literary output was in the form of essays. Even his most book-like product, *The Politics of Jesus* (1972, 1994[2]) bore the marks of its part-origin in independent essays. Important early essays on ecclesiology appeared in *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (1971) and reappeared amidst a collection of ecclesiological and ecumenical essays, *The Royal Priesthood* which was published in 1994 to critical acclaim. Two short semi-popular books dealing with ecclesiology appeared in later years, *The Fullness of Christ* (1987) and *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World* (1992). Some of the essays published in *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (1984) and in *For the Nations* (1997) are also pertinent to our theme. A considerable body of work, some of it directly relevant to ecclesiology reached the stage of desk-top publication,[33] but several significant essays remain unpublished.[34]

A major task of this dissertation is to synthesize Yoder's work on ecclesiology from these scattered sources. He produced popular and academic papers at the invitation of a great many different groups and institutions across the world. A good proportion of these were developed over a number of years before publication and then, with minor revision, republication. Although this process introduced some nuances of argument and refinement of terminology, no major turning points or changes of mind can be discerned. Yoder generally liked to retain for publication the particular angles of his original presentation which were employed to take into account the denominational background of the intended recipients.

In discussions with Mark Thiessen Nation I have contemplated whether Yoder's local style of theologizing might mean that some of his particular formulations might not have reflected his definitive position. In seeking to move audiences towards his position,

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[33] I have found it useful to refer to the following "Shalom Desktop" packets: "How to be Read by the Bible: a collection of old essays" (1995) and "The Jewish Christian Schism Revisited: a bundle of old essays" (1996).

[34] Yoder taught a course on ecclesiology at Goshen Biblical Seminary: a record of his presentation exists in the form of notes taken by John Paul Wenger in 1965 and typed with some necessary interpretative license by Harvey Graber. As such they cannot be taken as a major source of Yoder's thinking, yet much that appears in these notes reappeared in subsequent publications.

he worked strategically and might not have presented his full beliefs on a particular subject on each occasion (which is not to say that he obscured them). Perhaps the limited extent of this issue can be observed in *Body Politics*, which was produced by a Methodist Publishing house, in which he wrote for theologically unsophisticated lay people, yet was remarkably candid about his radical views.

More importantly, a systematic presentation of Yoder's views must take the local nature of his essays into account[35] - they must not be subjected to a simple process of universalizing extraction. The result is, perhaps, provisional: if the local approach to theologizing is valid then it must call into question any definitive systematization. A similar problem faces the New Testament theologian who would produce a "Theology of Paul" while aware of the occasional character of his epistles.[36] It is partly for this reason that I have characterised Yoder's ecclesiology as "prophetic:" an alternative expression would be, "a biblically rooted call to faith."[37] Yoder knew that the subjects that he engaged were in continual flux and interlocked in complex ways, and that to pretend to write either a basic introduction to, or a *summa* of his thought would not do it justice.[38]

Such considerations expose the limitations of my attempt at a systematic presentation of Yoder's ecclesiology.[39] If one would fully engage with his work, one must read a good range of his essays. Yet I have sought to convey his style by quite extensive quotations and have included details of origin to indicate their particular orientation. Having admitted the limitations of my project, I would maintain its value as a guide to Yoder's thought, as a means to assess it, and as a way to pursue its implications.

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[35] On the local nature of Yoder's theology, see §3.4.

[36] For a recent discussion of what is called the "contingency-coherence debate," especially in the work of J. Christiaan Becker, see Ben Witherington III, *The Paul Quest: The Renewed Search For The Jew of Tarsus* (Downers Grove, Ill./ Leicester, IVP, 1998), 288-292.

[37] I chose "prophetic" from his "The Prophetic Dissent of the Anabaptists" *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision* ed. Guy F. Hershberger (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald, 1957), 93-104. The alternative expression comes from *The Priestly Kingdom*, 8.

[38] See Yoder's important remarks in the introductions to *The Priestly Kingdom* (7-8) and *For the Nations* (9-11).

[39] Yoder was not opposed to systematic theological presentations as such. See his helpful discussion in "Thinking Theologically from a Free-Church Perspective," in *Doing Theology in Today's World: Essays in Honor of Kenneth S. Kantzer* edd. John D. Woodbridge & Thomas Edward McComisky (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Zondervan, 1991), 251-265.

My approach to the task of synthesis has been to give most weight to the latest published work since this reflects Yoder's most mature and carefully expressed opinion. Yet a properly nuanced understanding of his thought requires engagement with earlier and unpublished material. I have sought to understand before synthesizing and organizing Yoder's ecclesiological work, and then concentrated on his views on the particular subjects of community and authority. This involves identifying the underlying systematic choices which he made, testing them against others' work, and in some places criticising or augmenting them.

1.3 The Critical Task

Here I will reflect on the critical task of assessing what I have called prophetic theology in systematic terms. Subsections will discuss previous work on Yoder's ecclesiology and then provide an outline of the ground to be covered in this dissertation.

It is evident that a number of commentators on Yoder's work have failed to appreciate the local nature of his literary output.[40] Craig Carter, in a recent dissertation which generally understands Yoder's ethics well,[41] concludes by criticising Yoder for failing to provide a systematic presentation of his theology, and goes on to name three areas in which he feels his work was deficient: the resurrection of Christ, the work of the Spirit, and prayer and the spiritual life. I shall treat the question of pneumatology in later chapters, but here I will deal briefly with the matters of spiritual life and resurrection in order to illustrate the problems of this kind of criticism.

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[40] But some critics are guilty of a facile categorization which will not attend to the nuances of his thought. For instance, John W. Miller, "In the Footsteps of Marcion: Notes Toward an Understanding of John Yoder's Theology," *CGR*, Spring 1998. My chapter on the Jewish heritage of the Christian Church should be sufficient to refute such comment.

[41] Craig Carter, "The Pacifism of the Messianic Community: Christology and Ethics in the Thought of John Howard Yoder," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation; The University of St. Michael's College, Toronto, Canada, 1999). I have been asked not to make quotations from this work, due to the provisional form in which it was available to me.

Firstly, it is true that Yoder did not much emphasise such matters as new birth, prayer, spiritual disciplines, or worship. But this does not mean that he thought them unimportant.[42] In his review of *The Royal Priesthood*, Gerald Schlabach writes,

> Yoder turns out to have said somewhat more than we may have remembered about the grace needed to sustain costly discipleship and the priority of God's initiative in the Christian life (104, 126, 292); about the need for personal conversion (128ff) and about even the ancient creeds (191); and about practical guidance for building communities of faith (323ff).[43]

Yoder did not often display his detailed knowledge in extensive footnotes, and neither did he intend to write about every possible subject in any given field.

Secondly, Carter suggests that the resurrection was not mentioned in *The Politics of Jesus*. This is both false and misleading. In fact, in the second edition, the word "resurrection" is explicit on pp160 & 232; and its significance can be gathered from its first use - ""cross and resurrection" designates not only a few events in first century Jerusalem but also the shape of the cosmos." But resurrection is everywhere implicit in this book: even in its cover subtitle, "Behold the Man! Our Victorious Lamb." If the resurrection had not happened, the cross would be no victory. What concerned Yoder was that the Christian church had largely failed to grasp and follow the path to that victory.[44] I have characterized Yoder's ecclesiology as "prophetic" precisely because he chose not to produce neatly balanced systematic work. He sought to address the church at particular points of weakness and disobedience, and did not attempt to cover everything in an explicitly balanced way.

In systematic theological terms, the critic of such prophetic writings must therefore take into account what is implicit as much as what is explicit, before assessing the overall shape of a particular subject area such as ecclesiology by paying attention to the way the author holds it in balance with other key subjects (such as pneumatology or

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[42] See, e.g., the place given to praise, prayer and song in Yoder's unpublished "Checklist of the Functions of the Church" (Commission on Church Organization, April 10, 1967).
[43] Gerald W. Schlabach's review essay, "Anthology in Lieu of System: John H. Yoder's Ecumenical Conversations as Systematic Theology," *MQR* LXXI/2 (April 1997), 305-9.
[44] If any more evidence is needed, mention is made of Jesus' rebuke of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (51), his victory according to Phil 2:9-11 and Col 2:13-15 (145) and his proclamation as Lord (156).

anthropology).[45] Attention must be given to methodological and epistemological choices, and Yoder wrote explicitly about these in a number of places. I shall focus on his use of historical, sociological and theological models when discussing church leadership in chapter 7. The critic of prophetic ecclesiology should also form a judgement concerning the prophetic truth and incisiveness of the author. The reader will find each of these aspects of Yoder's ecclesiology clearly signalled in the section and subsection headings of the chapters that follow.

One other feature of this work is the inclusion of references to common ground between Yoder and theologians of other Christian traditions. Whilst I argue that Yoder's theological contribution to the church was of particular prophetic significance, important aspects of his theology were shared with others, and some have been subsequently formulated by others in more well-known traditions. The former cases demonstrate the catholic dimension of his theology, whilst on the grounds of the latter elements Yoder could be said to be a forerunner of important theological trends.

1.3.1 Previous Work on Yoder's Ecclesiology

A sympathetic and perceptive introduction to Yoder's ecclesiology has been provided by Michael Cartwright in "Radical Reform, Radical Catholicity: John Howard Yoder's Vision of the Faithful Church."[46] Two doctoral dissertations have been written which engage significantly with Yoder's ecclesiology. Philip LeMasters has published his thesis, [47], while that of Nigel Wright remains unpublished.[48] I shall comment briefly on these works here, though some issues that they raise will be dealt with more extensively later. Numerous other critics will be engaged in the course of the subsequent discussion.

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[45] Colin Gunton has remarked that Irenaeus is a good example of someone who is a systematic thinker, "but never succeeds in ordering those thoughts in what could be called a system." "Historical and systematic theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Colin Gunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3-19, here 11. I have taken several points in this paragraph from this helpful essay.
[46] Published in Yoder's *The Royal Priesthood*, 1-49.
[47] See n21 above. Page numbers in the next paragraph refer to this work.
[48] Nigel G. Wright, "Disavowing Constantine," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation; King's College, University of London, 1994). Page numbers in the subsequent paragraph refer to this work.

LeMasters' is a detailed critique of Yoder's view of church and state, addressing his biblical hermeneutic (52-66) and claiming that

> he fails to demonstrate both what the *precise historically displayed* relationship was between church and world before the union of church and empire, and how the conversion of Constantine altered that relationship in a negative way. Likewise, he does not describe with precision the nature of the continuing Constantinian flaw which he detects throughout the history of Christianity since the fourth century AD.
>
> While it is clear that Yoder thinks that with the rise of Constantine the "proper" relationship between church and world was compromised, he never provides an exacting account of what the "proper" relationship would require in a given historically, culturally located situation. To that extent, his critique of the relationship between church and world entailed by Constantinianism appears to operate more as abstract rhetoric than as a lucidly displayed, historically located account of how church and world should interact. (117)

Michael Cartwright has ably refuted LeMasters' criticism that Yoder's critique of Constantinianism suffered from a lack of historical and sociological precision by showing that it is a misreading of Yoder's work. In fact Yoder had made a careful analysis of the historical and social circumstances of various forms of Constantinianism in his essay "Christ the Hope of the World."[49] In addition, Yoder's extensive discussion of distinctive social practices in the church constituted a steadfast refusal to dehistoricize the work of the Holy Spirit in human history, and means that his critique of Constantinianism was primarily theological.[50]

Nigel Wright's is another detailed critique on the Constantinian issue, produced in comparison with the work of Moltmann, and dealing with the theology of the state and the ethics of pacifism, and within which ecclesiology is treated. He finds inadequacies in Yoder's doctrines of creation (105) and the Trinity (214), and thinks that he (like Moltmann) neglected God's wrath and implacable judgement (223).

I shall deal with Yoder's view of the relation between church and state, interacting with Wright in §3.3.2, and make various references to his ethics of pacifism. However, I will concentrate on ecclesiology in what follows since an ecclesiology does not depend

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[49] Published in *The Original Revolution* and *The Royal Priesthood.* Yoder had published a similar analysis in "The Constantinian Sources of Western Ethics," in *The Priestly Kingdom*, 135-147.
[50] Michael Cartwright, "Radical Reform, Radical Catholicity," 10-14.

upon a theology of the state. In fact, the notion of the state has continually changed and developed over time. It is much more important to develop an ecclesiology in relation to the world more generally, and this does emerge clearly in the following chapters. I believe that Yoder's emphasis on the centrality of conflict-resolution in church practice is given insufficient consideration in Wright's consideration of pacifism.

While the attack on Constantinianism is an important feature of Yoder's work, I shall show that his assessment of the history of Christianity finds the seeds of this problem in the second century in the severance between Judaism and Christianity (chapter 5). Yoder's work here is more profound than either LeMasters or Wright seem to have grasped. It is doubtful that the critiques of LeMasters and Wright can stand up against a full grasp of Yoder's ecclesiology, such as I shall present.

1.3.2 An Outline of the Dissertation

The next chapter orients Yoder's work in relation to contemporary ecclesiology and explores why he chose to avoid the ontological route to ecclesiology which currently enjoys some popularity. It raises questions about Yoder's approach to tradition, but consideration of these will be postponed until after the defining elements of Yoder's ecclesiology have been set out and discussed in chapters 3 and 4.

I shall argue that ecclesiology begins, not by asking "what is the church?", as though the church were a peculiar ontological entity, but "what is the identity of the church?", since the church is better understood in terms of human personal identities in community.[51] The first step which I must take to arrive at the identity of the church is to explore the character of the Christian community, and this will require two parts. In chapter 3 I show how Yoder characterized the church in terms of its communal allegiance to its Lord. I explore the central question which this raises, namely, the relation between church and world. But the character of the Christian community must also be specified in terms of its social practices, and so chapter 4 sets out several central

[51] At §2.3.1, drawing on Bauckham's discussion of the identity of God, introduced in §2.2.3.

practices of the Christian community. These are discussed and underlying theological moves are identified, before some preliminary conclusions are reached.

The second step which I must take to arrive at the identity of the church is to explore the tradition of the Christian community, and this will also require two parts. In chapter 5 I shall explore the Jewish heritage to which Yoder's ecclesiology gave particular significance, considering the schism between Judaism and Christianity as well as Yoder's particular reading of the Jewish Scriptures, before the relation between the Jewish and Christian versions of community can be compared. Chapter 6 deals with a number of issues raised by Yoder's understanding of church history, including the role of Scripture and the Spirit in the community, and focussing on the issue of Constantinianism from an ecclesiological perspective. Here I shall consider Yoder's role as a prophet to the whole church.

Chapter 7 examines Yoder's vision of leadership and the exercise of authority in the church. I engage with several analyses of the development of leadership, and explore a theological model for the church which Yoder did not consider, namely the household. The conclusion summarizes criticisms and appreciations of Yoder's ecclesiology, and also reviews the contributions to ecclesiology that have emerged in the course of the argument.

2. Contemporary Ecclesiology and the Question of Ontology

We are now in position to consider Yoder's ecclesiology in the light of current work in the field. I do not intend to attempt a survey of current work in the broad field of ecclesiology.[1] It is more important to provide a very brief sketch of a particular trend within ecclesiology. This will allow me to engage in a major discussion of the ontological approach to ecclesiology and Yoder's rejection of it.

Ecclesiology is an extremely diverse subject because it is the field of systematic theology in which the denominational allegiance of practitioners is most clearly apparent. Yet the twentieth century ecumenical movement has encouraged a healthy willingness to consider, appreciate and interact with Christian traditions which are unfamiliar to a particular scholar. The most well known theologians often have influence across the field, whether their own work appeals quite closely to their own church tradition, like that of the Orthodox Patriarch of Pergamon, John Zizioulas,[2] or is more markedly eclectic, like that of the now retired Protestant Professor of Systematic Theology at Tübingen, Jürgen Moltmann.[3]

I mention these two scholars because their work has been influential amongst established theologians such as, respectively, Colin Gunton[4] and Leonardo Boff [5], but also continues to be seminal for the work of a number of younger theologians wanting to develop an ecclesiology, like Miroslav Volf.[6] Of course, others have chosen to interact

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[1] For recent bibliography, divided into subject areas, see Avery Dulles & Patrick Granfield, *The Theology of the Church: A Bibliography* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 1999).

[2] In particular, John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1985).

[3] In particular, Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1977).

[4] Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997²). See particularly 60, 72, 95f, 106, 115, 196f.

[5] Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, trans. Paul Burns (Tunbridge Wells, Kent: Burns & Oats, 1988). See particularly 119, 151, 204-6.

[6] Volf interacts with Zizioulas and Moltmann (as well as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger) in *After Our Likeness; The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1998). For a discussion of this work see §2.2.2.

with innovative thinkers of earlier times[7], or to survey the broad sweep of church history while pursuing one particular theme.[8]

A significant feature which Zizioulas and Moltmann have in common is their trinitarian approach to theology generally. Indeed, the trinitarian approach must be considered a growth area in Systematic Theology in recent years[9]. Yet I shall show in my third section that the subject of my study has rejected the ontological route which often goes with this trinitarian approach. But I must begin by discussing the call for an ontological route issued by Professor Colin Gunton. This will require a second section on the significance of the creeds. Along the way subjects for greater exploration in later chapters will be noted.

2.1 The Ontological Route

In an important chapter on the church and community, Colin Gunton has suggested that the rare exercise of authority in the church after the manner of Jesus of Nazareth has been due, not simply to human sinfulness, but to "the institution's *claiming* too much of a realisation of eschatology, while *expecting* too little of the community as a whole."[10] Against the tendency to claim a coincidence of the church's action with God's action, he argues that there needs to be an emphasis upon the particularizing direction of pneumatology, just as the humanity of Jesus was enabled by the transcendent Spirit rather than determined by the immanent word.

> It is some such concern which despite its relative lack of pneumatological content has informed the ecclesiology of John Howard Yoder. In *The Politics of Jesus* his concern was to argue that the church's exercise of power should take its direction from the way in which Jesus bore himself in face of the political

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[7] For instance, Tim Bradshaw works with Karl Barth and John Henry Newman in *The Olive Branch; An Evangelical Anglican Doctrine of the Church* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 1992).
[8] Terence Nichols has produced a stimulating proposal from a Catholic viewpoint in *That All May Be One: Hierarchy and Participation in the Church* (Collegeville, Min.: Liturgical, 1997). I discuss this work in §7.3.1.
[9] Six years after the first edition of *The Promise*, Gunton could write, "Suddenly we are all trinitarians, or so it would seem." (*xv*)
[10] Colin Gunton, "The Church on Earth: The Roots of Community," in *On Being the Church*, edd. Colin E. Gunton & Daniel W. Hardy (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 48-80; here 57. Republished in *The Promise*, 56-82; here 64.

forces of his day. In more recent times he has turned his attention more explicitly to ecclesiology, arguing for a voluntary community which lives from the historical particularity of its origins. All such enterprises enable us to reappropriate an ecclesiology of the humanity of Christ. That is the first and crying need if responses to the collapse of Christendom are not to take the form of new authoritarianisms, as they are indeed doing. Christology, then, is the starting point. But of itself it does not take us far enough along the road, because we are seeking an ontology, some understanding of the nature of the church which is rooted in the being of God.[11]

So Gunton recognises Yoder's contribution to ecclesiology, but makes two criticisms: there is a relative lack of pneumatological content, and there is an absence of ontological description. The first criticism is unwarranted, as will become apparent from chapter 3 onward, but the second is more fundamental and requires an extensive discussion of method which will occupy this chapter.

2.1.1 Gunton's Ontological Proposal

Gunton's own theological project is dominated by the issue of ontology: "I believe that metaphysics, or, if that word carries too many negative connotations, ontology, a theology of being, is important."[12] Again, "I believe that it is only through an understanding of the kind of being that God is that we can come to learn what kind of beings we are and what kind of world we inhabit."[13] His chapter on the church intends a critique of patristic ecclesiology at the level of ontology. He maintains that

> the development of the doctrine of the Trinity was the creation, true to the Gospel, of a distinctively Christian ontology; but would add that its insights were for the most part not extended into ecclesiology. What happened was that the vacuum was readily filled by rival ontologies.

The entry of these rival ontologies appears to have been influenced by the neoplatonic doctrine of reality as a graded hierarchy and the Roman legal-political outlook exemplified by Cyprian.[14] Where he thinks that the earlier Fathers failed, Gunton procedes to find an ontology for the church in the being of God as communion, a

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[11] "The Church on Earth," 64-5, and *The Promise*, 69-70.
[12] Colin E Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity. The Bampton Lectures 1992* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 219.
[13] *The Promise*, *xi*.
[14] "The Church on Earth", 53 and *The Promise*, 60.

communion characterized by *perichoresis*. The practical outworking of this would result in no permanent structure of subordination in the church, but overlapping patterns of relationships, "so that the same person will sometimes be 'subordinate' and sometimes 'superordinate' according to the gifts and grace being exercised."[15]

Gunton's perichoretic ontology of the church yields rather little in his final section on the visible community. Perhaps this was inevitable in a brief essay, but up till now Gunton has not shown how his reworked ontology for the church provides guidance at the level of its practices. He has a chapter on the church as a community of reconciliation in *The Actuality of the Atonement*, which discusses baptism and communion in terms of a relational ontology,[16] and he speaks at the close of *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* of an ontology of sacrifice which enables the interrelatedness of the human race (among other things), and in which human beings may share.[17] A fuller work on the church would be needed to compete with the quite detailed picture which, as we will see, Yoder has provided of the practices which make up the specific community life and leadership of the church.

As Gunton acknowledges, much depends upon how trinitarian theology is formulated.[18] Brian Horne has discussed Gunton's use of Zizioulas' category of community and is concerned about a confusion arising from misgivings concerning hierarchical ordering. Standing in the Catholic tradition, Horne maintains that the life of the persons of the Holy Trinity is "both republican and hierarchical," and that it was "around the mystery of this paradox that many of the bitterest controversies of the early church revolved."

> I should want to maintain the doctrine that within the Trinity the Father is to be understood as the source of the Godhead and the ground of its unity: that there is an 'order' within the life of God and that this order is to be 'imaged' in the life of the Christian community. I do not believe that in saying this I am delivering

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[15] "The Church on Earth", 77 and *The Promise*, 80. He discusses this further in *The One, the Three and the Many*, 163-166, and on 152n32 refers to the origins of the term *perichoresis* first in Christology as discussed in an article by Leonard Prestige, *JTS* 29 (1928) 242-52.
[16] Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of the Atonement* (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1988), 187-200.
[17] *The Promise*, 204-206.
[18] Ibid., *xx*.

> ecclesiology into the hands of the neo-platonists who try to mirror an order of the celestial hierarchies in ecclesiastical institutions.[19]

I refer to Horne's essay to make the point that the move to trinitarian ontology in the attempt to deal with the question of authority in the church is problematic. Zizioulas would agree that there is an order within the Trinity, and would be closer to Horne here than to Gunton. Horne is able to make his point by appeal to the ecclesiology of early Fathers (not to their formulation of the Trinity) - "One sees the concept of the hierarchy entering ecclesiology as early as the letters of Ignatius of Antioch at the beginning of the second century" (11) - though he also finds it in St. Paul's elaborate imagery of the Church as the Body of Christ and in the first letter of St. Peter (16-17). So it seems that Gunton has chosen a particular, late formulation of the Trinity which is conducive to his reservations about hierarchy, but that Zizioulas and Horne can trump this by appeal to an early ecclesiology which matches hierarchical formulations of the Trinity. Is the later formulation more persuasive since it emerged after a long struggle to achieve a proper balance of theological nuances, or does the earlier formulation reflect more truly the faith once delivered to the saints? If we are to agree on an ontological route to ecclesiology, we must first decide whose formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity is right.

2.1.2 Volf's Trinitarian Free Church Ecclesiology

Another voice has recently joined the ecclesiological debate. Miroslav Volf has sought to produce a non-individualistic Protestant ecclesiology by interacting with the work of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and John Zizioulas in *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*.[20] Volf clearly achieves a coherent Free Church version of this by developing the social model of the Trinity following Moltmann.[21] He has produced a detailed argument for a nonhierarchical form of the doctrine of the Trinity, and is able to infer that ecclesiastical office should be exercised "collegially" (217). Yet there are

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[19] Brian Horne, "The Republic, the Hierarchy, and the Trinity: A Theology of Order," in *Order & Ministry*, edd. Christine Hall & Robert Hannaford (Leominster, Herefordshire: Gracewing Fowler Wright, 1996), 1-19, here 14ff. Unattributed page references in the following paragraph are to this essay.

[20] Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 3f. Unattributed page references in this subsection are to this work.

[21] See ibid., 4 and references to Moltmann throughout this book which originated as a *Habilitationsschrift* for which Moltmann served as supervisor, (*xi*).

significant drawbacks in Volf's book which have helped me to understand why I find Yoder's work so much more vital and important.

Volf's use of John Smyth, the first Baptist, as his "point of departure" (2) for a Free Church ecclesiology is interesting but curious. He believes that the Free Churches derive from the Reformed tradition (270), and this is true of a good many of them. But the Anabaptists did not derive from the Reformed tradition (their origins pre-date Calvin) and their ecclesiology must be distinguished from that of those earlier leaders who are associated with the Reformed (as opposed to Lutheran) movement, such as Zwingli, Bullinger and Bucer.[22] This is significant since Yoder eschewed the notion of the *ecclesia invisibilis*, a key element of the Reformed tradition.[23] Yoder was happy to discuss and associate himself with the Free Church tradition[24], but, strictly speaking, he should be located more narrowly within the Anabaptist or believers' church tradition. Volf is aware of the Radical Reformers and of the influence of Yoder and James McClendon among those "seeking to reclaim the communal dimension of the believers' church heritage" (3), but gives no reasons for choosing Smyth as a means to improve on their tradition. Indeed, he specifically criticises Smyth for individualism (172). Yet one of the strengths of the Anabaptist tradition, enabling it to correct an unhealthy individualism, is its theological emphasis upon communion, not just with God, but with other believers.

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[22] See §1.2.1 above.

[23] See Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood*, 70f, 170, and the discussion in chapter 3 below. On this point Volf is rightly critical of the Reformed tradition and clarifies thus: "Although one must indeed distinguish theologically between the *ecclesia visibilis* and the *ecclesia invisibilis*, one may not separate them from one another; doing so runs the risk of misusing alleged communion in the invisible church to justify separation from visible churches." (173)

[24] See "Second Draft of 'Theses' on the Definition of the Free Church Vision" (unpublished, 1968); "The Nature of the Unity We Seek: A Historic Free Church View." *Religion in Life* 26 (Spring 1957), 215-22; "Church and State According to the Free Church Tradition." In *On Earth Peace* ed. Donald F. Durnbaugh (Elgin, Ill.: Brethren, 1978), 279-88; "The Free Church Syndrome." In *Within the Perfection of Christ: Essays on Peace and the Nature of the Church*, ed. Terry L. Brensinger & E. Morris Sider (Nappanee, Ind.: Evangel, 1990), 169-76; "Thinking Theologically from a Free-Church Perspective." In *Doing Theology in Today's World: essays in Honour of Kenneth S, Kantzer*, ed. John D. Woodbridge & Thomas Edward McComisky (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Zondervan, 1991), 251-65; "The Free Church Ecumenical Style" in *The Royal Priesthood*, 231-41.

Volf's understanding of the grounding of the New Testament in the Old Testament Scriptures seems surprisingly inadequate. He maintains that in the New Testament "in contrast to Judaism and antiquity at large, faith has become the "prevailing term for man's relation to the divine."" (171) The quotation, expressing the common Lutheran viewpoint, is from Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament*[25], but in the light of the revolution in Pauline studies in the last twenty years, this opposition between ancient Judaism and the New Testament over faith cannot be sustained any more than it can over law.[26] At least as far as the writers of Romans 4 and Hebrews 11 are concerned, faith is the key to the writings of ancient Judaism! The notion of faith which Volf employs is that of *fiducia and assensus* (170), but there are good reasons to understand it, at least at times, in an embodied way, i.e., as "faithfulness" in both Old and New Testaments.[27] In chapter 5 I will describe Yoder's appreciation of ancient Judaism which anticipated the revolution in Pauline studies.

Volf's work allows significance to the universal distribution of the charismata within the church (228-33), yet he gives little place to the communal activity which is essential to its life, such as hospitality and sharing economic resources or mutual admonition and discipline. So when he says that "The Spirit present in all Christians "opens" each of them to all others. It starts them on the way to creative mutual giving and receiving, in which each grows in his or her own unique way and all have joy in one another" (189) he does not specify how this "opening" might happen, leaving his ecclesiology short on practices.[28] Yoder was able to answer this question better because he availed himself of the New Testament more thoroughly. Volf, following Smyth, starts

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[25] Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament: Volume 1*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (London: SCM, 1952), 89.

[26] The literature on this revolution is considerable, but a helpful summary is provided by Charles Cousar in *The Letters of Paul* (Nashville, Ten.: Abingdon, 1996), 82-86. See also the articles on "Faith" and "Law" in *DPL*, by Leon Morris (285-291) and Frank Thielman (529-542) respectively. Tom Wright provides a helpful overview of recent Pauline study and an annotated bibliography in *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Oxford: Lion, 1997).

[27] On faithfulness see Leon Morris in *DPL*, 287f, and the summary by Ben Witherington in *Paul's Narrative Thought World: The Tapestry of Tragedy and Triumph* (Louisville, Ken.: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 263-72. Cousar succinctly discusses recent scholarship on the subject in *The Letters of Paul*, 129-131.

[28] This is particularly disappointing in light of Volf's initial remark that " It is high time for constructive theologians, and not just practical theologians to take seriously the vast experiment in ecclesial practice taking place in this country." (6)

from Matt 18:20 as a definition of the church (135, cf., 197), but he does not appear to see this verse as the culmination of a larger passage, Matt 18:15-20, as did Yoder.[29]

> Finally, Volf admits that one should not expect too much of any reconceptualization of the doctrine of the Trinity, however necessary it may be... Conceiving the church in correspondence to the Trinity does not mean much more than thinking with theological consistency, all the while hoping that reality will not prove to be too recalcitrant. Of course, thinking about the Trinity must be shaped primarily by the scriptural narrative of the triune God. (194, cf., 199)

Again he concedes that "The idea of perichoresis starts with the story of revelation... " (209). These significant admissions surely beg important questions about the limitations of trinitarian theology which is turned into an ontological project rather than as a synthesis the Scriptural witness.

How does one choose between hierarchical trinitarians like Zizioulas or Horne and perichoretic trinitarians like Moltmann, Gunton or Volf? I suspect that the particular doctrine of the Trinity which any scholar may advocate can be given a form which is congenial to the particular church tradition or culture which he or she espouses. If this is the case, the appeal to inner-trinitarian relations cannot settle the question of church polity.

2.1.3 The Question of Cultural Change

One of the main reasons why the ontological approach is attractive is that it can appear to help with the problem of cultural change in the contemporary appropriation of the Scriptures. Volf makes this move when writing about gender identity in his earlier book, *Exclusion & Embrace*:

> Biblical "womanhood" and "manhood" - if there are such things at all, given the diversity of male and female characters and roles that we encounter in the Bible - are not divinely sanctioned models but culturally situated examples; they are accounts of the successes and failures of men and women to live out the demands of God on their lives within specific settings. This is not to say that the biblical construals of what men and women (of what men and women *as men and women*) should or should not do and be are wrong, but that they are of

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[29] See below, §4.1.1 and my excursus following §4.2.3.

> limited normative value in a different cultural context, since they are of necessity laden with specific cultural beliefs about gender identity and roles.[30]

He appears to have the same considerations in mind in writing about the church.

> The only good reasons that can be adduced in support of a hierarchical understanding of church organization are *cultural*. And these reasons should not be taken lightly, since it is only successful enculturation that makes possible the successful mission of the church. At the same time, however, cultural reasons in favor of a certain understanding of church organization are of limited value; since they are culturally specific, they cannot be universalized.[31]

The ontological approach seeks to abstract that which is theological from its cultural context in the Scriptures, and then attempts to reenculturate this theological core for another time and place. We can observe that two potential difficulties attend this approach: the process of abstraction and the process of reenculturation - these are both fraught with questions of hidden cultural or denominational allegiance.

Volf seems to think that the development of a trinitarian ontology would provide a transcultural norm which might be faithfully reenculturated. But if, as I have tried to show, any particular trinitarian ontology is itself a function of a particular (denominational) culture, it cannot perform the task assigned to it here. The egalitarian social doctrine of the Trinity is a comparatively recent phenomenon in theology, and the only way in which it might be allowed to displace the early formulations would be if it were to be widely accepted that it provided a better account of the New Testament than the previous view - that is, if it could be shown that the early formulations were not simply culturally limited, but partial distortions of the Scriptural foundations of Christianity.

When it comes to church polity, the ontological approach attempts to identify a set of theological analogies[32] which can transcend cultural change, and in turn inform a contemporary expression of the church. The problem is that the significance of so many social details which make up the embodiment of the church in a particular culture can become obscured in the double process (can they, in fact, be disentangled from

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[30] Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, Ten.: Abingdon, 1996), 182.
[31] Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 254.
[32] Volf helpfully discusses the limits of analogy in *After Our Likeness*, 198-200.

theological nuance?). For instance, one might hardly think that the question of whether a church meets in a dedicated building as opposed to an ordinary home has significance when considered from an ontological perspective. Yet the connections between the church imaged as the household of God and its social origins in the first-century Mediterranean household are significant for today's churches according to Robert and Julia Banks. Of course a certain degree of cultural transformation is essential, according to their vision of contemporary home churches[33], but this does not include the jettisoning of significant social details.

Volf gives real weight to his trinitarian arguments about the non-hierarchical structure of the church once he appeals to the New Testament:

> It is no accident that the New Testament attests no particular charisma of unity (although, for example, people with episcopal charisma are to expend special effort on behalf of unity on the basis of the specific character of their function). Not until the letters of Ignatius does the preservation of unity become a specific task of the bishop.... [In the] New Testament itself... the unity of the church seems especially to come about through the indwelling of the *one Spirit* (and with it the entire holy Trinity) *in every person*. Accordingly, and in analogy to the Trinity, *every* person as a bearer of the Spirit participates in the constitution of unity. This is also commensurate with the New Testament admonitions to foster unity which are in fact directed to all the members of the congregation (see 1 Cor 1:10-17; Eph 4:3). (219f)

This is a good account of every member responsibility for church unity, but what is compelling about it is not the trinitarian ontology which Volf has developed so much as his assemblage of Scriptural evidence for every member (as opposed to episcopal) responsibility for it.[34] In fact, Volf makes no appeal to cultural reappropriation here: rather he views Ignatius' move as a departure from New Testament pneumatology.

2.1.4 The Weakness of the Ontological Approach

Volf makes a significant move when he points out that the

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[33] Robert & Julia Banks,*The Church Comes Home* (Peabody, Ma.: Hendrickson, 1998²). Note their caveats about how this move can be made, 43-47. The significance of this becomes evident in §7.2.5.

[34] In an interesting footnote (219n122), Volf says "It is perhaps not without significance that both in 1 Cor 12:4-6 and in Eph 4:3-6, texts admonishing reader to unity, the sequence in the triadic formulae is not "God (father) - Lord - Spirit," but rather "Spirit - Lord - God (father)." But this footnote, intended to undermine the hierarchical view of the Trinity, can only be a minor point.

> correspondence between trinitarian and ecclesial communion derives not just from the formal demand to conceive the relation of the one and the many analogously on different levels. In substance, the correspondence is grounded in Christian baptism.... If Christian initiation is a trinitarian event, then the church must speak of the Trinity as its determining reality. (194f)

My reservations have to do not with holding to a doctrine of the Trinity, nor even with the need to debate the particular form of the Trinity, but with the use of the ontology developed in the process to decide the social shape of the church. Application of the ontological approach to ecclesiology requires a move beyond the simply trinitarian: it wants to make an analogical transfer from trinitarian communion to ecclesial polity. But I find myself asking whether relationships within the earthly church can be specified beyond rather vague generalities by analogy with inner-trinitarian relationships.

Apart from baptism, there are two New Testament warrants for the analogy between God and the church. Firstly, the image of the church as the body of Christ (e.g., 1 Cor 12:12, 27) enables theologians to draw connections between the human members and the divine life incarnate. Secondly, the high priestly prayer of Jesus, "As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us," (Jn 17:21) makes an explicit analogy between the intra-divine life and the interpersonal human life of the church. So there is a genuine sense in which reflection on God undergirds our reflection upon the life of the church. Yet we must observe that these biblical analogies between God and the church are employed to emphasise the importance of church unity; they do not support the application of intra-trinitarian relationships to intra-ecclesial differentiation.

In fact these very warrants limit the extent to which the analogy can be pressed. The image of the church as the body of Christ is augmented by the image of Christ as the head of the body, the church (Col 1:18), which maintains an appropriate differentiation between the divine lord and human church, a differentiation which is obvious in other New Testament imagery of the church such as bride of Christ or the temple of the Spirit.[35] The use of such images in the New Testament is rarely with reference to differentiation within the church. The exception is in the use of the household imagery, within which the household steward is employed as an image for church leadership (Matt

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[35] See Paul Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960).

24:45-51; 1 Cor 4:1ff), but here the differentiation between the steward and the head of the household is profound.[36]

Here it is clear that as well as analogy between God and the church in the New Testament there is dialectic. The bride of Christ requires cleansing and cannot yet be said to be "without spot or wrinkle" (Eph 5:26f). The parable of the household steward concludes with judgement on the office holder for his wickedness (Matt 24:50f). Paul warns that the work of church builders may not survive (1 Cor 3:10-15). Within a church which lives in the eschatological overlap of the ages, human leadership is necessary, but its justification in terms of the analogy between inner-trinitarian relationships is without Scriptural warrant and dangerous since it ignores the New Testament dialectic between Christ and a peccable church.

In the New Testament intra-church relations are rarely described in intra-trinitarian terms, but more often by analogy with the relationship between God or Christ and the church (e.g., Eph 2:14-22; 5:25ff). Thus there are other ways to talk theologically about church polity. James McClendon discusses the social nature of God not by appeal to inner-trinitarian relations, but through the doctrine of salvation since God is a missionary.[37] In other words, he stays at the level of divine-human relations, rather than resort to intra-divine relations. Stephen Fowl has recently demonstrated that it is quite possible to arrive at a theological conclusion about leadership in the church without appeal to complex trinitarian ontology, but by way of Christology:

> It is not simply Paul's account of his own life that provides him with the interpretive authority he exercises in Galatians. Rather, it is the Christological density of that account which underwrites Paul's authority - "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). Without this, Paul's exercise of interpretive authority would be dependent upon his goodness, his rhetorical power, or his institutional might. Hence, ecclesial authority must always retain such a Christological focus and cruciform shape.[38]

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[36] I consider the significance of such imagery in §7.3.1.

[37] James Wm. McClendon Jr., *Systematic Theology, Vol. 2; Doctrine* (Nashville, Ten.: Abingdon, 1994), 286, with reference to his third chapter.

[38] Stephen Fowl,*Engaging Scripture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 204.

I conclude that the analogy between trinitarian relations and church polity may have some weight but cannot be determinative because of the limitations of analogical method and the sinful nature of the church in this age. Ecclesiology cannot be determined by the choice of a trinitarian ontology (hierarchical or social), but should proceed less programmatically by means of the search for systematic balance which finds coherence within the interplay of other doctrines of the Christian tradition. In §6.1 I make it clear that the Christian tradition must be taken under the critical supervision of the Scriptures.

2.2 The Significance of the Creeds

Yoder was not ignorant of the possibility of an ontological route to ecclesiology: he deliberately chose not to adopt it because he did not regard it as normative. This raises the question of his estimate of the significance of the fourth and fifth century Creeds. I will first describe his understanding of the development of Patristic theology. This will be followed by a consideration of an objection to his view. Then a comparison will be made with a new approach to the same subject by Richard Baukham.

2.2.1 Yoder's *Preface to Theology*

Yoder's perspective on the development of doctrine in the Patristic period took account of historical, missionary and ethical factors.[39] He observed the political factors at play in the work of the Council of Nicea: Constantine not only convened it, "He made its decisions by dictating at the crucial points what wording they were to use; this despite the fact that he wasn't yet a baptized member of the church." (135) Of course, there were several reasons why Constantine was not baptised until near death, one of which was the contemporary view of the church, a product of third century decisions, which was that baptism might be delayed since post-baptismal sin could not be forgiven.[40] But Yoder

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[39] Yoder's written Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries lecture materials from 1973 were later published with minimal editing as *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method* (Elkhart, Ind.: Co-op Bookstore, 1981). Unattributed references in this subsection are to this publication.

[40] For a good summary and cmmprehensive bibliography on baptism see Everett Ferguson, s.v. "Baptism"

would reply that Constantine's unbaptized state corresponded to his continued use of violence and syncretistic behaviour (e.g., retaining the title Pontifex Maximus). If he had truly chosen to follow Christ, he should have taken on the Christian life in baptism, subject to the same repentance and discipline of any other convert. Postponing baptism until his deathbed testified to a possible awareness that authentic conversion would demand a different life style.[41] Ironically, when he allowed himself to be baptized, the ceremony was conducted by Eusebius of Nicomedia, the stoutest enemy of the creed endorsed by the Council of Nicea.[42]

Yoder was particularly concerned with the change of thought world evidenced in the formulations of the creeds. He described the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity by the Cappadocians as "a new set of language conventions..., a verbal formality which meets a need, which answers a question. It safeguards the New Testament content with at least a degree of success, in a quite different thought world." (137, 138) But he observed that this ontological, philosophical language was moving away from the narrative form of the Gospel story (139).[43] Moreover, the meaning of the term "person" continued to develop beyond the Cappadocian usage until, even within later Orthodoxy, it became more like the centre of consciousness or distinct will, and thus approached the modern meaning of personality. Once God was thought to have in himself three consciousnesses or three wills (as perceived by Mohammed among the Christians whom he encountered), the doctrine of the Trinity was deformed (139f). Modern talk of community or communion within God was interesting speculation, but could not claim to be based on the original doctrine of the Trinity (142). Commenting on modern efforts to understand

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EEC, 160-4.

[41] Yoder, "The Jewish Christian Schism Revisited: A Bundle of Old Essays" (Shalom Desktop Publication, 1996), 136.

[42] For an in-depth discussion of Constantine which bears out Yoder's point of view see Alistair Kee, *Constantine versus Christ: The Triumph of Ideology* (London: SCM, 1982). This has been subjected to criticism by Andrew Louth in his review in *Theology* 68 (March 1993), 140. Alan Kreider has recently thrown further light on Constantine's conversion by using a three-dimensional understanding of conversion: in terms of belief, belonging and behaviour in *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom* (Harrisburg, Pa.: TPI, 1999). Using this approach Kreider can say that Constantine was converted (which Kee denied), but only late in his reign at his baptism (33-7).

[43] Elsewhere he commented on the conventional debate concerning metaphysics occasioned by the concept of the Incarnation: "But when in the New Testament, we find the affirmation of the unity of Jesus with the Father, this is not discussed in terms of substance but of will and deed." *The Royal Priesthood*, 185.

ancient trinitarian thought up to Barth he observed that "there are two different kinds of structure in conflict. They interlock, they overlap, they lean on each other sometimes, but they are different." (143)

The Protestant movement rejected the Catholic view that the creeds were the history of the church, insisting that only Scripture was authoritative (156). But, being the product of the Catholic Middle Ages, the early Protestant Fathers tended to assume that the creeds were a handy summary of the Bible. The Anabaptists could assume the Apostle's Creed, as did most people, but they did not give it any final authority. Yoder urged that this issue must be thought through by the inheritors of the Anabaptist tradition.

> Probably, if we were to be fully honest, we would need to challenge more clearly the Catholic axiom which assumed the authority of the Councils and therefore of the creeds, challenge it more clearly at the point of automatic authority, while being still quite interested in listening to that history, in learning from it, and in sympathizing deeply with what it was trying to say. But it must mean something to us, that the Arians and the Nestorians - each in their own age - were less nationalistic, less politically bound to the Roman Empire, more capable of criticizing the emperor, more vital in missionary growth, more ethical, more biblicist, than the so-called Orthodox churches of the Empire. At the most, these creeds are fruitful definitions of the nature of the problem we are struggling with. They are helpful as a fence, but not as a faith... (157)
>
> They are part of the only history we have. It is a fallible history and a confused history. A lot of dirty politics was involved in getting them defined, in explaining their meaning, and still more in applying their authority. But this is the history to [through?] which God has chosen to lead his confused people toward perhaps at least a degree of understanding of certain dangers, certain things not to say if we are to remain faithful. (158)

In other words, there were problems with the whole ontological project, understandable as it might be in terms of the more or less successful attempt to express Christian faith in terms of the intellectual preoccupations of the dominant culture of the Roman empire. One problem was that the means used to reach conciliar decisions and then to enforce those decisions on the church were counter to the life of the one they professed (but failed to characterize). Another problem was that the project did not enable the Orthodox churches to exhibit dynamic Christian faith, as did the more heterodox churches, despite their partially erroneous doctrine.[44]

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[44] The western bias of the common view of mission in the Patristic period has been seriously challenged.

Yoder emphasised that, though the doctrine of the Trinity became the official doctrine of the church, it was not given by revelation (140). It was the solution to an intellectual difficulty which Christians would always have arising from insisting on both the normativity of Jesus and the uniqueness of God. We may say, then, that he was appreciative of the struggles of the Fathers to understand and formulate what they believed in terms of the thought patterns of the then dominant culture, but that he maintained that their achievement was not normative for the church.

Late in his life, Yoder made a clear distinction between two understandings of the incarnation. The Greek view was of a metaphysical mystery in which "the qualitative abyss between the *logos* (Word) and *sarx* (flesh), between ultimate meaning and contingent reality, was miraculously breached, once." In this ontological version of the incarnation, the leap of the spark from the other world to this one had changed everything, and thus neither the truth, nor the church would change. The Jewish view understood incarnation, not as a punctiliar miracle forming the hinge of history, but that "*in* the concrete historical life and death and rising of Jesus, the otherwise invisible God has been made known normatively." Only this historical view entailed God entrusting fallible humans with sanctity so that failure and reformation were true possibilities.[45]

We may observe here a major polarity which remained throughout Yoder's theology: that between the Greek and the Jewish ways of thought.

2.2.2 Response to Yoder's View of the Creeds

Yoder's work in this area has been taken up and radicalized by the Mennonite theologian, J. Denny Weaver[46], but I shall explore it by examining two criticisms made of it by

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"Daniélou's observation is very much to the point: the extraordinary vitality of eastern Syrian Christianity obliges us to "change our perspective" in studying the history of the ancient church and go beyond our current, Westernized view to appreciate the Eastern mold of a Christianity in its first beginnings." Eduardo Hoornaert, *The Memory of the Christian People*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Tunbridge Wells, Kent: Burns & Oats, 1989), 107. The quotation is from J. Daniélou and H. Marrou, *The Christian Centuries, a New History of the Catholic Church*, vol. 1, *The First Six Hundred Years* (New York, 1964) 46. See also David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991), 202-5.

[45] Yoder, "Historiography as a Ministry To Renewal," *Brethren Life and Thought* 42/3 & 4 (Summer & Fall 1997), 216-228, here 216-7. Other later work which makes reference to patristic theology includes "Trinity versus Theodicy: Hebraic Realism and the Temptation to Judge God," unpublished, 1996.

[46] J. Denny Weaver, "Christology in Historical Perspective," in *Jesus Christ and the Mission of the*

another Mennonite theologian, James Reimer. One of Reimer's first public critiques of Yoder characterized his theological method as "fundamentally historical-eschatological (horizontal) in nature and entail[ing] a tacit bias against a metaphysical and ontological (vertical) understanding of the Christ event."[47] He thinks that Yoder "shows his true colours" when he recommends historicism as a philosophical stance.[48] He objects that the Hebraic view of reality had more in common with the Greco-Roman than either have with the modern world in which a metaphysical and ontological understanding of God's transcendence and interaction with the world is almost completely lost.

Reimer finds that several modern Mennonite theologians have "a deep suspicion of the more classical emphasis on that part of human experience which one might variously call the vertical, mystical, ontological, sacramental, or a-historical dimension of reality."[49] Here he is dependent upon David Tracy's distinction between a "mystical-priestly-metaphysical-aesthetic" emphasis in theology and the "prophetic-ethical-historical" emphasis.[50] Yet to employ this very generalised distinction is to be liable to miss particular nuances. The passage in which Yoder shows commitment to historicism comes in his chapter on "Christ as Priest: the Atonement," and in chapter 4 we shall see that he could discuss church practices in profoundly sacramental terms. Yoder's version of "historicism" was not the product of the Enlightenment which Reimer (rightly) repudiates; it was his way of formulating the presentation of genuine human agency in the Bible over against Hellenistic ways of fatalistic thought.[51]

Church:Contemporary Anabaptist Perspectives, ed. Erland Waltner (Newton, Kan.: Faith and Life, 1990), 83-105; "Atonement for the Non-Constantinian Church," *Modern Theology* 6 (July 1990): 307-23.

[47] A. James Reimer, "The Nature and Possibility of a Mennonite Theology" *CGR* 1/1 (Winter 1983), 33-55, here 42-3.

[48] Reimer (ibid., 44) quotes Yoder, "So if we would take historicism as a philosophical stance that is congruent with the Bible, in reading the Bible - we might have a new resource for developing an understanding of the need for the work of Christ." *Preface to Theology*, 226.

[49] Reimer, ibid., 52.

[50] Ibid., 42 & 46, with reference to David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 204.

[51] Yoder wrote later in that chapter on the Priesthood of Christ, "Wrath and hell, to say it in kind of philosophical contemporary language, are the Biblical words for the bindingness of our historicity." (236) But this did not mean that Yoder did not speak of God or Satan: "Satan does have rights. They are given him by the loving respect that God has for the autonomy of his creatures." (236)

In a more recent ecumenical paper contributing to an affirmation of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed,[52] Reimer observes an ambivalence in Yoder's views, expressed in both *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace and Revolution* and *Preface to Theology*, as to whether the Constantinian shift[53] of the church implicated the formulation of trinitarian orthodoxy as defined at Nicea and Constantinople: "Despite his positive and empathetic portrayal of the patristic controversies of the first four centuries, in the end Yoder is highly dubious about the political motivations behind the final statement." (139) Reimer next attempts to demonstrate a "fundamental continuity" (150) between the ontological language of Nicea-Constantinople and the Scriptures. He takes the majority view that the classical orthodoxy of the creeds was a necessary doctrinal development.[54] This entails a revealing interpretation of the work of Richard P. C. Hanson:[55]

> in the first few centuries after Jesus of Nazareth came and went, a new religion was born, the Christian religion, with a new doctrine of God profoundly indebted to but ultimately different from the Jewish doctrine of God.... [But] the development of the fourth-century doctrine of God was in fact a return to biblical origins. It was, however, a return characterized by new language and new imagery. (153)

Reimer is even critical of Hanson for slipping into a "Yoderian kind of argument" when he characterises the relation between Greek philosophical ideas and the tradition of Christian truth in terms of "a tension." On the contrary, he believes that the historical-Hebraic and the ontological-Hellenistic "ought not to be torn asunder... [but] held together." (154-5) Reimer makes a number of references to the standard work of Aloys Grillmeier, but seems to have overlooked the latter's significant observation: "The

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[52] A. James Reimer, "Trinitarian Orthodoxy, Constantinianism, and Theology from a Radical Protestant Perspective," in *Faith to Creed: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Affirmation of the Apostolic Faith in the Fourth Century*, ed. S. Mark Heim (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1991), 129-161. Unattributed page references following in this subsection are to this essay. Reimer goes on to criticise the work of J. Denny Weaver on pp140-144.

[53] I delay a full examination of "Constantinianism" until after expounding Yoder's view of ecclesiology and its relation to tradition; see below §6.2.

[54] See also A. James Reimer, "Theological Orthodoxy and Jewish Christianity" in *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder* ed. Stanley Hauerwas et al., (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1999), 430-448, here 437.

[55] Richard P. C. Hanson, *Studies in Christian Antiquity* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1985).

coming Arian struggles are no more than the consequences of the error which was introduced at the time of the Apologists. The error lay in the fact that the Stoic Logos was essentially monistic."[56] Reimer recognises the legitimacy of Yoder's concern about the changes that Constantinianism brought in the ethical teaching of the church, and believes that the trinitarian faith of the creeds

> provides us with the best conceptual critique of all political theology that legitimates a civil religion - that is, one in which religion or theology functions primarily as a conservative force in society, a glue that holds all things together, usually sanctifying the dominant culture of the age." (160)

I find this conclusion somewhat ironic, for, while it is true that Athanasian orthodoxy was unpopular with some of the emperors in the fourth century, thereafter the creeds hardly seem to have generated much by way of a critique of civil religion throughout the medieval period. For all the admirable effort of the creedal formulators, the fact that there was no concomitant ethical formulation should give the historical commentator pause, for it is in the realm of ethics that the engagement of theology with politics becomes most revealing. The issue here is not so much a question of sinister political motivation within the process which resulted in the fourth century creeds, but the preoccupation with intellectual formulations which took attention away from the previous ethical stances of the church, such as the commitment to the poor[57] and to peace. If heresies such as gnosticism and Arianism could provoke the formulation of doctrine, why was there no equivalent ethical formulation in response to the temptations to greed and violence?

The answer must lie, at least in part, in the accumulation of slow changes in the character of Christianity in the century or so before Constantine's legitimization of Christianity. The foremost historian of late antiquity, Peter Brown, has described the early church's transition from "a sect ranged against or to one side of Roman civilization" to "a church prepared to absorb a whole society" as "probably the most important *aggiornamento* in the history of the Church." It was "preceded, for two generations, by

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[56] Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 1: *From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, trans. John Bowden (London: Mowbrays, 1975²), 110.
[57] On this see Eduardo Hoornaert, "The Nicene Creed and the Unity of Christians" in *Faith to Creed* ed. Mark Heim, 108-116.

the conversion of Christianity to the culture and ideals of the Roman world."[58] I will discuss aspects of this accommodation in §5.1, and I will argue in §6.2 that Yoder's was a nuanced position which did not depend upon the attribution of particularly dark motives to those involved in creedal formulation, nor did it deny significant continuity between Scripture and the elements of the creeds.

Reimer moves towards his conclusion by asserting that "The theological formulations of Nicea, Constantinople and Chalcedon cannot be accounted for exclusively in terms of their sociopolitical context." (159) It must be said that Yoder made no such assertion. Reimer's purpose in his essay is to maintain the traditional Mennonite concerns about violence while arguing for a more positive view of the fourth century creeds. But the rhetorical effect of this bland assertion is to obscure the complexities of the debate and to cast Yoder's nuanced position in a dismissive shadow. I do not believe that his criticism of Yoder in several essays has seriously weakened the latter's position. In effect, the fourth century creeds were a form of local theology, and not theology-in-general.[59] They must therefore be vulnerable to criticism informed by analysis of their particular historical context.

2.2.3 Baukham's Re-examination of Monotheism and Christology

In order to illuminate Yoder's criticism of fourth century theology I shall describe the major new understanding of New Testament Christology in its Jewish context which Richard Baukham presents in a preliminary fashion in *God Crucified*[60] He works with the category of the identity of the God of Israel, which focuses on who God is rather than what divinity is, in order to show that early Judaism had clear and consistent ways of characterizing the unique identity of the one God. He defines identity as "the personal

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[58] Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1971), 82.
[59] I have taken this expression from the illuminating essay by J. Denny Weaver, "Theology in the Mirror of the Martyred and Oppressed: Reflections on the Intersections of Yoder and Cone" in *The Wisdom of the Cross* edd. Stanley Hauerwas et al., 409-29, particularly 420f. On local theology see below, §3.4.
[60] Richard Baukham, *God Crucified* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 1998). Unattributed page references in this subsection are to this work. Baukham gives notice that a more substantial exposition will follow (*vii*).

identity of self-continuity" in distinction from other possible meanings such as numeric oneness, ontological sameness or permanence in time.

> Reference to God's identity is by analogy with human personal identity, understood not as a mere ontological subject without characteristics, but as including both character and personal story (the latter entailing relationships). These are the ways in which we commonly specify 'who someone is'. (7n)

Bauckham first explores the monotheism of second temple Judaism, and makes an important distinction between intermediary figures who are angels or exalted patriarchs and those other intermediary figures which are personifications or hypostatizations of God himself (1-22). He then shows how the New Testament writers understood the exalted Jesus in the latter category; they thought he participated in the unique divine sovereignty to the extent of including him in the creative activity of God, and thus regarded him as intrinsic to the unique identity of God (25-42). He goes on to illustrate how the New Testament writers considered the earthly Jesus as belonging to the unique divine identity and thus that the crucified Christ must be included in the divine identity (45-77).[61] This reading of the New Testament enables Bauckham to move beyond the standard distinction between 'functional' and 'ontic' Christology,

> a distinction which does not correspond to early Jewish thinking about God and has therefore seriously distorted our understanding of New Testament Christology. When we think in terms of divine identity, rather than essence or nature, which are not the primary categories for Jewish theology, we can see that the so-called divine functions which Jesus exercises are intrinsic to who God is. This Christology of divine identity is not a mere stage on the way to the patristic development of ontological Christology in the context of a trinitarian theology. It is already a fully divine Christology, maintaining that Jesus Christ is intrinsic to the unique and eternal identity of God. The Fathers did not develop it so much as transpose it into a conceptual framework constructed more in terms of the Greek philosophical categories of essence and nature. (*viii*)

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[61] Bauckham's treatment of New Testament Christology is by no means unusual among contemporary scholars. See the following: N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), part one; Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 314-316; David D. Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel: Divine Presence and God's People in the First Gospel* SNTSMS 90 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Finally, Baukham explores the implications of his work for understanding theological developments up to the fourth century, developments which have been interpreted in two dominant ways, broadly speaking. Some have seen Nicene theology as the culmination of a development of ideas which were embryonic in New Testament Christology. Others have supposed that the attribution of true divinity to Jesus could not have originated within a context of Jewish monotheism and so the divine Christology of Nicea must represent the triumph of Greek philosophy in Christian doctrine. Baukham's argument renders the first of these views, the developmental model, seriously misconstrued, since the New Testament writers already had a deliberate and sophisticated divine Christology. The second view is completely overturned since a Jewish understanding of divine identity was indeed open to the inclusion of Jesus within it, whereas Platonic definitions of divine substance or nature and Platonic understanding of the relationship of God to the world made it extremely difficult to see Jesus as more than a semi-divine being, neither truly God nor truly human.

> In the context of the Arian controversies, Nicene theology was essentially an attempt to resist the implications of Greek philosophical understandings of divinity and to re-appropriate in a new conceptual context the New Testament inclusion of Jesus in the unique divine identity." (78)

But his final remark is even more important.

> However, if the patristic development of dogma secured for a new conceptual context the New Testament's inclusion of Jesus in the unique divine identity, the Fathers were much less successful in appropriating the second key feature of New Testament Christology... : the revelation of the divine identity in the human life of Jesus and his cross. Here the shift to categories of divine nature which the Fathers took for granted proved serious impediments to anything more than a formal inclusion of human humiliation, suffering and death in the identity of God. That God was crucified is indeed a patristic formulation, but the Fathers largely resisted its implications for the doctrine of God. (79)

Baukham's work on Christology illuminates what was at stake in all fourth century theological debates. These were attempts to express New Testament theology in the dominant intellectual categories of late antiquity. The Fathers did not completely capitulate to Greek categories since the *homoousion* functioned within a trinitarian and narrative context in the Nicene and Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creeds (78), yet they did

not succeed in expressing the most profound aspect of New Testament Christology, as did "Martin Luther, Karl Barth and more recent theologies of the cross." (79) Like Yoder, Baukham has concluded that fourth century theology may be educative for those seeking to express Christian beliefs in new intellectual categories, but the creeds which resulted must be regarded as Christologically deficient and thus inadequate definitions. As intellectual developments move further from the mind-set of late antiquity their usefulness decreases.

Baukham himself is not averse to the ontological project and has been excited by Moltmann's social trinitarianism.[62] Yet I take his elegant proposal as an endorsement of Yoder's view of the creeds, developed many years previously. In particular Baukham's starting point in Jewish categories and his recognition of Greek philosophical influence upon developing Christian theology are significant.

2.3 Yoder's Rejection of the Ontological Route

Yoder was critical of what he called "an overvaluing of first principles."[63] He refused in general to take the path of ontological argument since true ontology was out of human reach:

> Reality always was pluralistic and relativistic, that is, historical. The idea that it could be otherwise was itself an illusion laid on us by Greek ontology language, Roman sovereignty language, and other borrowings from the Germans, the Moors, and the other rulers of Europe. Yet within this relativity and in the style of noncoerciveness, we can and must still proclaim a Lord and invite to repentance. We report an event that occurred in our listeners' own world and ask them to respond to it. What could be more universal than that?[64]

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[62] See Richard J. Baukham, *Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making* (Basingstoke, Hants.: Marshall Pickering, 1987); *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995).
[63] Yoder was referring to "abstruse debates about systematic theology" like that concerning *anhypostasia/enhypostasia*, in "The Basis of Karl Barth's Social Ethics." Unpublished paper from the constitutive meeting of the Midwestern section of the Karl Barth Society at Elmhurst, Ill., Sept. 29-30 1978, 2. See also Yoder's adherence to the particular, historical origins of the Christian movement: "What must replace the prolegomenal search for "scratch" is the confession of rootedness in historical community... The church precedes the world epistemologically." (*The Priestly Kingdom*, 7, 11).
[64] Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 59, cf., 9.

In the postmodern world narrative testimony was the means whereby the particular gospel could reach out to all the world. Yoder was fully aware of what he was doing here; he addressed the issue of living in an age of pluralism.

> The discussion of Christology is [conventionally] a matter of ontology and of logic: it turns around the conceivable meanings of words like "nature" and how we can possibly move with those meanings from one language world to another.... As unavoidable as that kind of exercise is, it is early modern rather than contemporary, and scholastic rather than confessional.[65]

It was part of that seductive enterprise which promised answers once for all, but which was increasingly recognised as self-serving. Since the Enlightenment, "the rational ontology which orthodoxy had bought into became no longer a self-evident framework, within which alone one could make sense, but rather a liability."[66] The current pluralist/relativist world was

> the child of the Hebrew and Christian intervention in cultural history. It is the spin-off from missionary mobility, from the love of the enemy, from the relativising of political sovereignty, from a dialogical vision of the church, from a charismatic vision of the many members of the body, from the disavowal of empire and theocracy.[67]

In specific relation to ecclesiology Yoder refused the ontological route in a way which forms an important bridge to my next chapter. *"The principle of coherence of the church's self-understanding is narrative rather than deductive. What it means to be the church is to be spoken of as a cause being implemented and not an ontology being realized."*[68] Appealing to Karl Barth's characterization of the life of the church as "liturgical," as re-known and re-presented in a celebratory way in the categories of ordinary historical reality, Yoder repudiated trust in "some mediating generalizations about the the nature of things" to form a bridge between the particularities of Jesus's history and our own history. The ontological project was inherently generalizing, universalizing, and thus inappropriate to the work of ecclesiology, even if it had a place in thinking about human beings in general. "The narrative character of the church thus

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[65] Yoder, "That Household We Are," (unpublished address at the Believers Church Conference, Bluffton, Ohio, October, 1980), 2.
[66] Ibid., 7.
[67] Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 60.
[68] Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood*, 110.

implies first of all the wholehearted affirmation of its particularity."[69] For Yoder, ecclesiology could proceed without ontology.

2.3.1 Conclusion

Gunton's criticism of Yoder rests upon the assumption that the church can be said to have an ontology. Now the Patristic debate about ontology was required by the Christian assertion that Jesus was both human and divine. But no such startling claim was made for the church: the claim that the church was in some sense the Body of Christ was never understood in the same terms. Despite a certain kind of over-realised eschatology on the part of some church leaders (notably Eusebius), Christ remained over against the church, seated at God's right hand until he should return as judge. Perhaps this was why the Fathers did not engage in debates about an ontology of the church.

It seems to me that, while there may be some value in pursuing the ontological debates in the attempt to clarify the doctrines of Christology and the Trinity, there are too many difficulties in extrapolating from them to ecclesiology. Rather than attempt to find an ontology of the church, it is better to understand the church in terms of the human personal identities in community which together form it. Following Baukham's lead in Christology, I maintain that ecclesiology begins, not by asking "what is the church?", as though the church were a peculiar ontological entity, but "what is the identity of the church?" In my next four chapter headings I have used Baukham's categories of "character and personal story," though translating "personal story" into "tradition" since that is the church's story: these sum up the identity of the church.

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[69] Ibid.

3. The Character of the Community: (1) Its Allegiance

At the centre of Yoder's theology was Jesus Christ: his ecclesiology therefore flowed from considering the church's Lord. In order to grasp the centre of Yoder's ecclesiology we must begin with his treatment of the community-forming work of Jesus Christ which bore fruit in the new humanity of the church. From here we may proceed in the second section to his vision of the church as a community of specific allegiance to its Lord. In a penetrating analysis of conventional definitions, he turned attention to what differentiates between membership and non-membership of the church. I have argued that ecclesiology should proceed by means of a search for systematic balance in relation to the witness of Scripture rather than by the ontological route. I therefore seek to unfold Yoder's understanding of the community by discussion of related dimensions of systematic theology: anthropology, mission, ethics, and pneumatology.

Although Yoder held that the church was a community distinct from the world around it, he also believed that there existed a continuity between its members and non-members. Thus section three explores the precise nature of this continuity, including his view of the relation between church and culture and, more specifically, between church and state. Characterizing the church in terms of membership rather than the institution, raises the question of the unity of the church. Thus the fourth section explores the unity of the church in relation to its local nature, and considers two methodological implications.

3.1 The Lord of the Church

Yoder's ecclesiology begins with "the concrete historical reality of the life, death and rising of Jesus," in which "the otherwise invisible God has been made known

normatively."[1] In this work we cannot give extensive attention to his Christology,[2] but it is important to establish the connection between the work of Jesus in all its particular involvement with the sociopolitical forces of his day and the fruit that this work bore, the church in all its socio-political dimensions (as we shall see).

> Preaching and incorporating a greater righteousness than that of the Pharisees, and a vision of an order of social human relations more universal than the Pax Romana, he permitted the Jews to profane a holy day (refuting thereby their own moral pretensions) and permitted the Romans to deny their vaunted respect for law as they proceeded illegally against him, This they did in order to avoid the threat to their dominion represented by the very fact that he existed in their midst so morally independent of their pretensions. He did not fear even death... His very obedience unto death is in itself not only the sign but also the firstfruits of an authentic restored humanity.[3]

Jesus' death, then, did not stand alone as the termination of that new vision of a more universal order of human social relations, but it yielded a harvest of human community according to the creator's intention.

In the following subsections I shall first give attention to Yoder's characterization of Jesus' vision of a new order of social relations, and then expand on how he understood Jesus to be the risen Lord of an eschatological church, and of a renewed humanity.

3.1.1 The Formation of a New Social Reality

Yoder's main work on the ministry of Jesus was incorporated into the second chapter of *The Politics of Jesus* and was drawn mainly from the third Gospel. I need to highlight his

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[1] Yoder, "Historiography As A Ministry To Renewal" *Brethren Life and Thought* 43/3&4 (Summer & Fall 1997), 216-228, here 217.

[2] Concerning the ontological pursuit of Christology, Yoder wrote: "We are not called to renew in the language world of pluralism/ relativism an analogue to what those first transcultural reconceptualizers did; not to translate their results, but to emulate their exercise.

"The last thing we should ask, then, would be whether we can translate into our time from theirs the notion of preexistence or of the participation of the Son in creation. That would be to contrast the rules of two language worlds instead of finding a message to express within both... What we need to find is the interworld transformational grammar to help us to discern what we need to happen if the collision of the message of Jesus with our pluralist/ relativist world is to lead to a reconception of the shape of the world, instead of rendering Jesus optional or innocuous." (*The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press), 56)

[3] Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, (Grand Rapids, Mi. & Carlisle, Cumbria: Eerdmans & Paternoster, 1994[2]), 145. Unattributed page references in this section refer to this work.

attention to what was innovative in Jesus' ministry, especially as it pertained to community.

At the synagogue in Nazareth Jesus made prophetic use of the Jubilee vision (31), but also he proclaimed "the opening of the New Age to the Gentiles." (Lk 4:25-7) The juxtaposition of these two elements meant that "the undercutting of racial egoism by the second thrust prevented the former from being taken in a nationalist sense." (32) After reporting "a rising tide of effectiveness among the multitudes, the sick, and the tax gatherers," and the mounting backlash of the religious establishment (Lk 5:21, 30, 33; 6:2, 11),

> Luke emphasizes that it was "in these days" that Jesus, after a night long vigil, named twelve key messengers, first fruits of a restored Israel. To organized opposition he responds with the formal founding of a new social reality. New teachings are no threat, as long as the teacher stands alone; a movement, extending his personality in both time and space, presenting an alternative to the structures that were there before, challenges the system as no mere words could.
>
> Cognate as the *functioning* of this inner circle may have been to the way any other rabbi would live with his favoured disciples, there is more to its *formation* than that. Their number, the night of prayer, and the following ceremonial proclamation of woes and blessings all serve to dramatize a new stage of publicness. The opening beyond Judaism which was predicted in the synagogue at Nazareth is now beginning: the "seacoast of Tyre and Sidon" is represented on this great plain. (33)

The ethic of the Sermon was "guided by the twin loci of imitating the boundless love of God for his rebellious children (Lk 6:35-6) and by being strikingly different from the ordinary "natural law" behaviour of others" (Lk 6:32-4), and this was "conceivable only if a new age has begun, and if that age's novelty is at the point of economic realism." (34) Yoder's consideration of the Jubilee dimension of Jesus' teaching led him to reflect on the ensuing controversies concerning the law: "As soon as it was a matter of accentuating the humanitarian prescriptions of the law of Moses, Jesus became more radical than the Pharisees." (65)

It was after the feeding of the five thousand and Peter's confession that Jesus first taught about the cross (Lk:9:21-24).

> He begins to be estranged not only from the Jewish leaders but also from the crowds, because the messianity he proposes to them is not to their tastes; yet

> what he proposes is not withdrawal into the desert or into mysticism; it is a renewed messianic claim, a mountaintop consultation with Moses and Elijah, and a march to Jerusalem. The cross is beginning to loom not as a ritually prescribed instrument of propitiation but as the political alternative to both insurrection and quietism. (35-6)

But the crucifixion perspective was not reserved to Jesus alone; the cost of discipleship was extensively spelt out (Lk 14:25-33). "Jesus is here calling into being a community of *voluntary* commitment, willing for the sake of its calling to take upon itself the hostility of the given society." (37) This quality of lifestyle of the disciples was to have a dramatic effect upon behaviour within their community, for at the Last Supper Jesus taught that greatness consisted in service (Lk 22:25-7).

> He rather reprimands them for having misunderstood the character of that new social order which he does intend to set up. The novelty of its character is not that it is not social, or not visible, but that it is marked by an alternative to accepted patterns of leadership. The alternative to how the kings of the earth rule is not "spirituality" but servanthood. (39)

Although *The Politics of Jesus* was primarily concerned with Christian ethics, Yoder could not avoid making acute observations concerning Jesus' formation of a new community which embodied his mission to break Israel's bondage (Lk 1:69) and inevitably formed a challenge to the dominant understandings of what it meant to be God's people within Judaism in the first century (22). The church that was empowered by the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost was not so much an innovation within God's people as the reempowerment of the new community which Jesus had already inaugurated during his earthly ministry.

3.1.2 The Eschatological Church

Jesus' ministry had raised conventional Jewish hopes for the restoration of Israel as God's kingdom, yet he had eschewed those conventions, inspired by a transformed vision. Yoder recounted the death of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke as the culmination of all that he had himself taught as the will of God (Lk 24:21):

> Here at the cross is the man who loves his enemies, the man whose righteousness is greater than that of the Pharisees, who being rich became poor, who gives his robe to those who took his cloak, who prays for those who

> despitefully use him. The cross is not a detour or a hurdle on the way to the kingdom, nor is it even the way to the kingdom; it is the kingdom come. (51)

This meant that the church must be understood eschatologically: it was the fruit of the coming of God's kingdom in Jesus Christ. Some aspects of this were derived fairly directly from the New Testament, though reference was made to Oscar Cullmann's analogy with "D-Day" and "V-Day."[4]

> The New Testament sees our present age - the age of the church, extending from Pentecost to the Parousia - as a period of the overlapping of two aeons. These aeons are not distinct periods of time, for they exist simultaneously. They differ rather in nature or in direction; one points backwards to human history outside of (before) Christ; the other points forward to the fullness of the kingdom of God, of which it is a foretaste. Each aeon has a social manifestation: the former in the "world," the latter in the church or the body of Christ.[5]

The new aeon, which came into history in a decisive way with the entire work of Christ, involved a radical break with the old aeon in which human life was organised by means of violence and coercive power. Jesus proclaimed the doom of this old aeon and inaugurated a new human community characterised by love in the way of the cross, so that "in God's People the world's renewal has begun."[6]

Yoder pointed to the significant shift in ecclesial eschatology in the century between the Edict of Milan and Augustine's writing of *The City of God*. The church and the world became identified since all of society (in the Roman Empire) was thought to be Christian. "Augustine... held that the Roman church was the millennium."[7] As we shall see in later chapters, Yoder understood this as one among several changes that had taken place in the self-understanding of the church in its early centuries, and which he regarded

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[4] Spelled out in "Peace without Eschatology?," one of a number of ecclesiological essays which were collected in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesial and Ecumenical* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1994), 144-167, here 150.

[5] Ibid., 146.

[6] This is the sub-title of a book to which Yoder contributed: *A Declaration on Peace: In God's People the World's Renewal Has Begun*, by Douglas Gwyn, George Hunsinger, Eugene F. Roop, John Howard Yoder (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald, 1991).

[7] Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood*, 154. "Augustine, who espoused an austere version of the millennial hope in his earlier works (e.g., *Serm.* [ed. Mai] 94.4f. [393-395]; *C. Adim.* 2.2 [394]; *Serm.* 259.2), later abandoned any literal interpretation of Revelation 20 in favour of Tychonius's ecclesiological reading (*Civ. Dei* 20.7ff)." Brian E. Daley, s.v., "Chiliasm" in *EEC*, 240.

as radically subversive of its true life. So the church needed to recover that eschatological vision of itself expressed in the New Testament.

> The same life of the new aeon that was revealed in Christ is also the possession of the church, since Pentecost answered the Old Testament's longings for a "pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh" and a "law written on the heart." The Holy Spirit is the "down payment" on the coming glory and the new life of the resurrection is the path of the Christian now.[8]

To maintain this strongly eschatological vision of the church was to require a profound pneumatology, and I shall expand on this in §3.2.4

3.1.3 The New Humanity

The authentic restored humanity with which we are confronted at the cross of Jesus saw fruit follow in the form of a new human community. A flavour of Yoder's treatment of the beginning of the world's renewal in God's people can be caught from his treatment of 2 Cor 5:17 ("if anyone is in Christ, then God creates anew"). He thought this of such importance as to give it extensive treatment in one essay, "The Apostle's Apology Revisited," clearly disposing of the common individualistic reading of this passage:

> It is obvious that, *if* we *assume*, on the basis of our late Western personalistic culture, that "inwardness" is the most fundamental definition of what it means to be who one is, then we will feel at home reading Paul's description of the newness of the new creation as meaning a renewed inwardness.... [However, w]hen Paul says that Jesus took our place, he is not talking about inwardness, but about Jerusalem. The coming of Christ was not located in the soul. His teaching was not located in the soul. His crucifixion and his resurrection were public events with witnesses.... Then it would be more fitting, if we wish to understand the change in the creation that Paul is talking about, to assume he means not first of all an inward change from which then some outward modifications are to be derived, but a *real*[9] change, which needs to be stated and interpreted for its own sake rather than gaining anything by being boiled down to inwardness and then expanded out from that center....
>
> So what Paul says is not centred on the changes that take place within the constitution of the individual person, but on the changed way in which the believer is to look at the world, and especially on overcoming the "carnal standards" in which he used to perceive men in pigeonholes and categories and

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[8] Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood*, 148.

[9] The use of "*real*" here is somewhat inexact. Yoder was struggling to express his wholistic view of humans which would not give more significance to the 'inner' than to the 'outer', but took the 'outer' as the measure of the 'inner.' This will become more evident below.

> classes. Now he is able to perceive them in the light of their being in the place of Christ... The reconciliation of Jew and Gentile in the "new humanity" is *first* a community event. It *cannot* happen to a lone individual. The prerequisite for personal change is a new context into which to enter. A Gentile can only find Abraham by meeting a Jew. A Jew can only celebrate the messianic age by welcoming a Gentile."[10]

The whole purpose of God in the particularity of the new humanity was the ultimate extension of this new creation to all: "there is no reason to have a particular identity if it is not to be shared with others."[11] This meant that the life of the church in the wider world was public, open to scrutiny by those outside, although it embodied virtues rarely recognised as such outside the church, such as servanthood, enemy love and forgiveness.[12]

3.2 The Church as a Community of Specific Allegiance

Yoder discussed how the church may be defined in a number of the essays collected in *The Royal Priesthood*. His view is best encapsulated in one entitled "A People in the World." [13] He arrived at his definition by several routes.

Firstly, Yoder carefully constructed a triangular typology[14] of streams of spiritual vitality in the development of the Reformation under the shadow of Zwingli. At one corner was the "theocratic" vision of the renewal of the church which hoped to reform society at large with one blow, and which took the locus of historical meaning as the

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[10] Yoder, "The Apostle's Apology Revisited," in *The New Way of Jesus: Essays Presented to Howard Charles*, ed. William Klassen (Newton, Kan.: Faith and Life, 1980), 115-134, here 129-30, 131 and 133. Yoder found his reading supported by Gal 6:15; Eph 2:15; 4:1-32; Col 3:9-11 and similar texts which refer to receiving a new heart (Heb 8:10), becoming sons of God (Jn 1:12) or being born again (Jn 3:3-7).
[11] "The New Humanity as Pulpit and Paradigm," *For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1997), 37-50, here 41.
[12] Ibid., 48.
[13] Originally presented at a Conference on the Concept of the Believers' Church in 1967, and most recently published in *The Royal Priesthood*, 66-101. Subsequent unattributed page numbers in this chapter refer to this collection.
[14] Yoder was aware of the limitations of using a typology and of the problems of labelling types (71n8). He was acutely aware of the dangers of caricature since the anabaptist tradition had historically been subject to so much misunderstanding and misrepresentation. In order to communicate beyond his own tradition he realised the importance of employing words familiar outside it, yet sought to fill them with his own nuances (68).

movement of the whole society (Zwingli himself, Bullinger or Erastus, Calvin and the Scots). At another corner was the "spiritualist" reaction which carried the dismantling of externals to its logical extreme and moved the locus of meaning from society to the inward spirit, thus remaining in the frame of theocratic society without a specific social form of dissent (Schwenckfeld, later Spener and Franke). At the third corner the "believer's church" type stood over against the other two: with the spiritualists, it castigated the coldness and formalism of official theocratic churchdom[15]; with theocracy, it would not reject forms altogether but developed those found in Scripture, expressive of the character of the disciples' fellowship (Sattler, Marpeck). Thus

> With the theocratic vision, it rejects the individualism and the elite self-consciousness of the spiritualist. But the social form that it proposes as an alternative to individualism is not the undifferentiated baptized mass of the reformed *corpus christianum* but the covenanted fellowship enjoyed with others who have pledged themselves to following the same Lord. (72)

In fact Yoder identified an individualism in the Lutheran heritage of much of Protestantism (Zinzendorf, Wesley, Kierkegaard, Bultmann, Billy Graham) which has been undergoing a process of dismantling by New Testament exegetes since the mid-1960s.[16] It was increasingly recognised that even such words as "justification" and "Gospel" could not be simply correlated with subjective awareness of guilt and forgiveness, but carried the dimension of peoplehood: "The work of God is the calling of a people, whether in the Old Covenant or the New." (74) He demonstrated the importance of the peoplehood theme in the New Testament from the first vision of the Apocalypse (Rev 5:9), 1 Pet 2:9f and Ephesians. Yoder thus defined the church in terms of an elect people who were a covenanted fellowship of those who had a specific allegiance to the same Lord.

One term which Yoder initially employed to express this was "distinctness." (74) It is important to recognise that his usage carried theological nuances of both divine

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[15] It should be acknowledged that all institutional forms of the church are liable to lapse into cold formalism, yet Yoder was constructing a typology here, and within the theocratic type, the tendency to formalism is intrinsic because its membership necessarily includes the reluctant as well as the obedient.
[16] Yoder named Markus Barth and Hans-Werner Bartsch in this essay, but also mentioned Krister Stendahl and noted more recent developments in Pauline studies in *The Politics of Jesus*, 214-227.

election and human allegiance. Later he realised the need to make an important change, when he added to his republished essay in a footnote:

> A few decades' observation of the perennial debate on this point suggests that "specific" would be better than "distinctive" or "different." To be "specific" is to belong to one's species, to befit one's kind. That will not always involve being different, although the cases where "it makes a difference" will be the decisive ones. (81n19)

This was a significant improvement since Bruce Winter has pointed out the inappropriateness of the *sociological* model of distinctiveness that has been applied by some scholars to the study of the self-understanding of the church in the New Testament, treating it as a 'conversionist sect' which is said to have encouraged 'the maintenance of social distance' in order to preserve coherence and distinctiveness as a means of attracting potential converts. This

> sociological model does not fit... first-century Christianity reflected in 1 Peter... [wherein] it is suggested that the means by which God's virtues are declared are not social separation but the social involvement of Christians in the everyday life of the city through good works (2:9ff). This is not to deny that 1 Peter may not have been written in part to overcome any possible social separatist tendencies developing among Christians as a defence mechanism against hostile pressure. The teaching of 1 Peter does not encourage separation from society but rather from sin (*cf.* 1:17; 2:11)."[17]

It is for these reasons I have chosen to employ the term "specific allegiance" rather than "distinctness" or "distinctiveness" in the title of this section.

Secondly, Yoder arrived at a definition of the church by considering how, from the days of the Nicene Creed, the church interpreted its mission and nature in terms of "marks" that are minimum standards which enable the existence of the church to be recognised (e.g., "one, holy, catholic and apostolic"). At the Reformation, a distinction had been made between these *notae* as attributes and as "marks," but also another definition of the church had been adopted within classical Protestantism: "The church is wherever the Word of God is properly preached and the sacraments properly administered." Apart from noticing the petitionary nature of this definition, Yoder

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[17] Bruce W. Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 1994), 14f. He is alluding particularly to J. H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981).

identified a more fundamental flaw in this statement of criteria: "the point of relevance in their application is not the church but its superstructure... it does not focus upon the congregation... the presence of the community is no part of the definition." (76) Of course, state churches would presume that the total community would be present as the congregation (on pain of punishment), but the presence of that community was not explicit in the definition. Yoder noted that an attempt was made to remedy this omission in the Reformed tradition by the addition of a third criterion, namely "proper discipline" (again petitionary). Yet this "applied primarily to the synod pattern of government, the fourfold ministry, and some kind of moral control over the behaviour of members." (76)

In contrast, Yoder insisted that the church must be defined in terms, not of a leadership body and its regulatory function, but of the total Christian community. At the human level, the church must be understood as consisting of the community of its members. The touchstone definition of the church must relate to the persons present: "in what attitude they are listening, what they understand, how they respond to one another, and with what orientation they return to the week's activities." (76)[18] The Christian community was made up of those who were committed together to follow Christ. This meant that the extent of the community could be determined at the level of personal membership, and membership could be expressed in terms of confession (more than profession) or discipleship.

In "Let the Church be the Church,"[19] Yoder described the church as "a new kind of social reality" marked off from surrounding society with "an existence, a structure, a sociology of its own" (170). Now I would observe that all such social entities require the

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[18] At this point Yoder might seem to lapse partly into a definition of interior states of members, like that of the spiritualist type which he had earlier defined, yet precisely because he had made that previous typological distinction he should be understood to be referring to certain inner attitudes which correspond to the outwardly expressed specific allegiance which was previously defined and is supplemented below. The Anabaptists debated the inner/outer question at length, and Pilgram Marpeck expressed this correlating position best. See Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora, 1995), 300-301 and 327-337.

[19] This originated as a lecture to the Episcopal Pacifist Fellowship in 1964, and was most recently published in *The Royal Priesthood*, 169-180.

notion of a boundary, a border beyond which it does not extend[20], but where and how should the boundary be drawn in order to define the extent of the church?

> Christians have traditionally distinguished between the visible church and the invisible church, between the spirit and the body, between the ordained and the laity, between love and justice. We may now come to see that a more useful and a more biblical distinction would be one that does not try to distinguish between realms of reality like body and spirit or the visible and the invisible, nor between categories defined by ritual (lay and ordained), or by abstraction (love and justice), but rather between the basic personal postures of men and women, some of whom confess and others of whom do not confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. The distinction between church and world is not something that God has imposed upon the world by a prior metaphysical definition, nor is it only something that timid or self-righteous Christians have built up around themselves. It is all of that in creation that has taken the freedom not yet to believe. (171)

I will show how Yoder dealt with the community boundary in §4.1.3.

We can add a third way in which Yoder emphasised the specific allegiance of the community: by contrasting it with the "world". In "The Otherness of the Church"[21] he sought to isolate the concepts "church" and "world" (from *aion houtos* in Paul, *kosmos* in John) in their pre-Constantinian significance. "World" in the first centuries signified "not creation or nature or the universe but rather the fallen form of the same, no longer conformed to the creative intent." (55) He insisted that

> The "world" must return in our theology to the place that God's patience has given it in history. The "world" is neither all nature nor all humanity, nor all "culture"; it is *structured unbelief*, rebellion taking with it a fragment of what should have been the Order of the Kingdom.... There are acts and institutions that are by their nature - and not solely by an accident of context or motivation - denials of faith in Christ. (62)

Now this notion of "structured unbelief" requires further specification. Previously in the same essay, he had written of the post-Constantinian Christianization of the world as having backfired:

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[20] "By definition, the boundary marks the beginning and end of a community. But why is such marking necessary? The simple answer is that the boundary encapsulates the identity of the community and, like the identity of the individual, is called into being by the exigencies of social interaction." Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London & New York: Routledge, 1989 {1985}), 12.

[21] This originated as a lecture delivered at Drew University in the winter of 1959-60, and is to be found in *The Royal Priesthood*, 54-64.

> having had the sole effect of raising the autonomy of unbelief to a higher power. Islam, Marxism, secular Humanism and Fascism - in short, all the major adversaries of the Christian faith in the Occident and the strongest adversaries in the Orient as well - are not nature- or culture- religions but bastard faiths, all of them the progeny of Christianity's infidelity, the spiritual miscegenation involved in trying to make a culture religion out of faith in Jesus Christ. (61)

So Yoder understood many influential world movements, whether religious or ideological, which had taken a hostile approach to those holding a Christian confession, to be at least partly the result of the false move of the church after Constantine. But more needs to be said about this subject below (\$3.3 and \$6.2).

Having expounded three ways in which Yoder understood the church as a community of specific allegiance, we must now begin to explore four systematic subjects which are hardly corollaries of this understanding, but rather integral to it. The following subsections are not full discussions of the particular fields, but deal with key issues which immediately arise from Yoder's ecclesial stance. Further aspects of these fields will be treated later.

3.2.1 Ecclesial Anthropology

Yoder clearly defined the boundary of the church as a social entity in terms of its members' confession, marked by the ecclesial practice of believer's baptism (see \$4.1.3). He understood Jesus' severe warning of the cost of discipleship in terms of the transcending of family ties (Luke 14:25) as "calling into being a community of *voluntary* commitment." [22]

This position has been critically characterised as "voluntarism" by Oliver O'Donovan in his *The Desire of the Nations*[23]. Strangely, O'Donovan does not define what he means by voluntarism until later in his book, and then he does so by contrast with creation *ex nihilo*.[24] The point of departure for such "voluntarism" was the

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[22] Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 37.

[23] Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 223f. A whole issue of *Studies in Christian Ethics* (11/2, 1998) was devoted to responses to this work.

[24] In a puzzling passage, arresting for its notion of God, O'Donovan writes, "Faith in creation means accepting the world downstream of the Arbitrary Original, justified to us in being, goodness and order. Voluntarism, on the other hand, situates the agent at the source; it offers a mystical access to the moment of

romanticism of Rousseau, but its roots lay in heterodox Arminianism and the myth of the social contract.[25] But O'Donovan has fastened on a certain segment within a much broader spectrum of positions which might be characterised as "voluntarism." For Yoder was clearly drawing upon a different, biblical tradition of human volition, found already with Moses (Exod 32:26), Joshua (Josh 24:15), Elijah (1 Kings 18:21) and Jeremiah (Jer 2:9-13),[26] a tradition which finds its point of departure in the permission and prohibition of the creator who holds man and woman responsible for their choice (Gen 2:16-17; 3:11), and calls a people into covenantal fidelity requiring a response (Exod 19:5-8). O'Donovan's criticism of Yoder has confused the specific character of modernist voluntarism with a much older creational/ covenantal human faculty and responsibility.

Stanley Hauerwas thinks that "O'Donovan is on to something when he criticises Yoder's "voluntarism," which can too easily, particularly in modernity, underwrite rationalistic accounts of the faith."[27] Hauerwas' concern is understandable since he is acutely aware of modern liberalism, yet Yoder's discussion of the boundary of the church in terms of personal confession was always set in the context of the church as a social entity and must be understood, not as a private, individualised religiosity, but as a public stance involving submission to the church. He followed Balthasar Hubmaier in being concerned not so much with the decision to be baptized as with the capacity of candidates for baptism to participate in the congregational process of "binding and loosing" (as we shall see in the next chapter). Thus Yoder could assert that "The alternative to arbitrary individualism is not established authority in which the individual

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origination, and leads the spirit to the rapture of pure terror before the arbitrariness of its own choice." (274)

[25] O'Donovan, 275.

[26] O'Donovan had already written that "an element of confessional voluntarism" had entered Israel's sense of itself with Jeremiah, Habbakuk and Ezekiel" (79), and subsequently recognised that the adult baptismal candidate's decision to follow Christ is "the one, total and final decision of life." (178) The latter is part of a oddly muddled attempt to justify infant baptism which I see no need to pursue.

[27] Stanley M. Hauerwas, *Wilderness Wanderings: Probing Twentieth Century Theology and Philosophy* (Boulder, Col.: Westview, 1997), 224n15. For an extremely perceptive appreciation of Hauerwas' work, see Arne Rasmussen, *The Church as Polis: From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jürgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1994). See especially chapter 12, "The Church and Liberal Society."

participates and to which he or she consents. The alternative to authoritarianism is not anarchy but freedom of confession."[28]

Whilst my introduction began with the problem of pervasive individualism in contemporary Western culture, it would be wrong to deny the significance of the person.[29] The biblical tradition, though giving weight to the significance of the community, does not eliminate the significance of each person. For example, scholars have remarked on the alternation between singular and plural address in Deuteronomy 4 which has the effect of balancing both concerns.[30]

It is significant that Richard Mouw, a distinguished Reformed theologian, could co-author an article with Yoder which set out several commonalities between Anabaptist and Reformed Christians, one of which concerned "the strong volitionalist elements in the thinking of the two communities... Both make much of *surrender* as foundational to righteous living." Another commonality was that

> each group insists upon a very clear connection between personal piety and more "corporate" commitments... piety can never be considered as a purely individual affair: it always must manifest itself in some kind of conformity to communal standards and expectations. This is especially important to emphasize in understanding the Anabaptist vision, since there is a tendency these days to equate a stress on individual choice with "individualism." For Anabaptists, the making of a conscious choice is a crucial step in the process of *becoming* a Christian: but what one takes upon oneself by means of this individual choice is very much a communal identity. For both traditions "following Jesus" has an inescapably corporate dimension to it.[31]

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[28] Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 24-25. Hauerwas had earlier appreciated Yoder's point here and quoted this very passage! *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World and Living in Between*" (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Baker, 1995 {1985}), 72.

[29] I use this term in preference to "individual" in order to avoid the latter's connotations of individualism.

[30] See A. D. H. Mayes, "Deuteronomy 4 and the Literary Criticism of Deuteronomy" *JBL* 100 (1981) 23-51, here 27-30. This forms an interesting comment on the preceding chapters, concerning which see Norbert Lohfink, "The Problem of the Individual and Community in Deuteronomy 1:6-3:29" in *Theology of the Pentateuch: Themes of the Priestly Narrative and Deuteronomy* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 227-233. See also Horst Dietrich Preuss, "The Election of the Individual," *Old Testament Theology, Volume 1*, trans. Leo G. Perdue (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1995), 28-30. For a perceptive recent discussion of differences between ancient and modern conceptions of the individual see Robert A. Di Vito, "Old Testament Anthropology and the Construction of Personal Identity," *CBQ* 61, 1999, 217-238.

[31] Richard J. Mouw and John H. Yoder, "Evangelical Ethics and the Anabaptist-Reformed Dialogue" *JRE* 17 (Fall 1989), 121-137, here 131, 133.

Whereas for Luther, the human will was bound to sin in this life, so that no free will was possible, the Anabaptists, following Karlstadt[32], understood sin as being essentially volitional and thus expected those who confessed Christ to conform their lives to Christ. Thus the work of the Spirit in regeneration led to discipleship.[33] Yoder's tradition was clearly less pessimistic about human capacity for discipleship than that of the Magisterial Reformers, but this cannot be dismissed along with Arminianism. His definition of the church in terms of membership on the basis of the personal postures of men and women towards Jesus Christ is matched by his insistence that faith is "a decisive dimension" in ethics (see $3.2.3): "a great deal does depend on the identity of the moral agent."[34] It is Yoder's emphasis upon the significance of the human agent which opens up the possibility of a theological discussion of the social dimension of the life of the church.

In this anthropology human beings are thoroughly relational. This relationality is not based in an ontology by analogy with inner-trinitarian relationships, but in the narrative of restoration of right relations between human beings and God in Jesus Christ, which also grounds right relations within the community of the new creation (see further $4.2.3).

3.2.2 Ecclesial Mission

First, the gospel message is not simply carried verbally by certain individuals in the church (principally the preachers), but it is embodied in the life of the whole community.

> The work of God is the calling of a people, whether in the Old Covenant or the New. The church is then not simply the bearer of the message of reconciliation, in the way a newspaper or a telephone company can bear any message with which it is entrusted. Nor is the church simply the result of a message, as an alumni association is the product of a school or the crowd in the theater is the product of the reputation of the film. That men and women are called together to a new social wholeness is itself the work of God. (74)

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[32] See Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 26.
[33] See Harold S. Bender, ""Walking in the Resurrection" The Anabaptist Doctrine of Regeneration and Discipleship," *MQR* XXXV (1961), 96-110.
[34] Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State* (Newton, Kan.: Faith and Life, 1977), 68, 29.

Thus, as the Word became flesh - as Jesus not only preached the gospel, but embodied the gospel - so the church not only preaches the gospel, but embodies the gospel. This is why the church is the body of Christ - Jesus identifies with those who confess him and follow him in life.

It is important to hear Yoder's connection between the specific identity of the church and the meaningfulness of the gospel message. He insisted that

> *the distinctness of the church of believers is prerequisite to the meaningfulness of the gospel message*. If what is called the "the church" is the religious establishment of a total society, then the announcement that God has created human community is redundant, for the religiously sanctioned community is identical with the given order. The identification of the church with a given society denies the miracle of the new humanity in two ways: on the one hand by blessing the existing social unity and structure that is a part of the fallen order rather than a new miracle, and on the other hand by closing its fellowship to those of the outside or the enemy class or tribe or people or nation. (75)

Integral to the understanding of the church as a community of specific allegiance was its calling to mission: only a community which was distinct from the rest of society could proclaim the gospel to those without such specific allegiance so that they might adopt it.

However, the definitions of the church in the Magisterial Reformation were necessarily silent on its missionary dimensions:[35]

> Some early visions of missionary responsibility, especially as sometimes linked to the early commercial colonial corporations of Britain and the Netherlands, could assume it to be quite adequate to think of the missionary task as adequately [*sic*] discharged by propagating right preaching and right sacramental practice in other parts of the globe; but in the absence of the creation of a genuine indigenous community this turns out to be pure paternalism and makes the alienating elements of sacramentalism and clericalism all the more distasteful by the alien form in which they are exported into another society. (78)

Once the church was freed from the assumption that all members of a given society are Christians, it would be possible for it to recover a sense that it is set in the midst of an unbelieving world and called to mission to that world. Yoder reflected that in the 1960s,

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[35] For an assessment of the Reformers and mission which draws attention to the "remarkable program of missionary outreach" of the Anabaptists, see David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991), 243-248.

leading ecumenical missiologists (Willem A. Visser't Hooft and Stephen Neill) had adopted this view of the church, but that they were simply restating what had been said about the church by the Dutch anabaptist, Menno Simons (77-8). "Thus peoplehood and mission, fellowship and witness, are not two desiderata, each capable of existing or of being missed independently of one another; each is the condition of the genuineness of the other." (78)

Yoder repeatedly insisted that the call of Jesus to live a different way from that of the world did not mean a legalistic withdrawal from society out of a concern for moral purity, but rather a call "to an active missionary presence within society, a source of healing and creativity."[36] He was heavily involved in Mennonite missionary work and wrote a number of popular essays on mission between the late '50 and mid '60s, some unpublished papers and occasional scholarly papers. However, this dissertation is not the place for a full discussion of his missiology.

3.2.3 Ecclesial Ethics

Yoder understood Christian ethics as integral with ecclesiology.

> "Ethics" is not an independent mode of access to the understanding of either ancient documents or ancient ideas; it is rather one subdiscipline of theology. It has to be constructed on the foundations laid by the community's prior history.... [T]he primordial ethical obligation is the cohesion of the believing community in the face of the pressures working against its identity.[37]

He pointed out that, within the heritage of the Magisterial Reformation, Christian behaviour, although considered essential, was "nonetheless treated as subordinate to Christian teaching and worship." (227f) So, in the first generation of ecumenical effort, discussion of sacraments and doctrine had predominated. Where there had been consideration of ethical matters, there had been little conviction that there might be unity concerning specific issues. Yet,

> Unity in ethical commitment was for the apostolic church no less central than unity in faith and worship. Christian behaviour was not the lowest common

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[36] In "Christ the Hope of the World," *The Royal Priesthood*, 194-218, here 217.
[37] Yoder, "Ethics and Eschatology" in *Ex Auditu* 6, 1990, 119-28. These are the opening two sentences and part of another on p123.

> denominator of a fully baptised society, but a kind of life strikingly, offensively different from the rest of the world; it dared to believe that Christ himself was its norm and to believe in the active enabling presence of the Holy Spirit. (228)

Yoder understood the biblical demand for holiness in terms of the distinctiveness of the called people (80) and this propelled him to a preoccupation with social ethics. The new life of the Christian community in the early centuries could be described in terms of its social ethics, a social ethics different from those beyond the church because they were derived from those of its Lord. Jesus must be perceived

> not just as a teacher nor just as an actor on the social scene but in the unity of his teaching and his person. His life is a life according to the Sermon on the Mount; the cross is the meaning of his moral teaching.... It is evident in Jesus that when God comes to be King, Jesus rejects the sword and the throne, taking up instead the whip of cords and the cross. (184-5)

Jesus was perfectly obedient to the will of the Father, and as such is the revelation of the will of the Father for those who would belong to and obey God. Disciples of this Jesus find that they cannot convince non-disciples to adopt this social ethics: Christian ethics is specific to the church.

In his essay, "Why Ecclesiology is Social Ethics,"[38] Yoder showed how Karl Barth affirmed

> for the first time in mainstream Protestant theology since Constantine the theological legitimacy of admitting, about a set of social structures, that those who participate in them cannot be presumed to be addressable from the perspective of Christian confession. (108)

In the late 1940s Barth had begun to derive the sociology of the community around the Word from the central place of confession. This enabled Yoder to show how the misdefinition of the place of the people of God in the world which had entered the church with Christendom had distorted its ethics. (109) He insisted that the church must renounce any aspiration to be able to impose its will on the unbelieving world or to persuade it of the rightness of its cause upon appeal to some supposedly neutral ground.

> To recognize that the church is a minority is not a statistical but a theological observation. It means our convinced acceptance of the fact that we cannot oblige the world to hold the faith that is the basis of our obedience and, therefore, should not expect of the world that kind of moral performance that

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[38] In *The Royal Priesthood*, 102-126.

> would appropriately be the fruit of our faith... Recognition of this minority posture calls not for social cynicism or for withdrawal but for a profound intellectual reorientation." (175f)[39]

Without embarking on an extended discussion of Yoder's social ethics, we should note here his extensive engagement with those from other Christian traditions who disagree. Some other approaches to Christian social ethics appealed to channels of ethical insight which marginalised that of Jesus; e.g., H. Richard Niebuhr distinguished between an ethic of the Son and an ethic of the Father, with God the Father seen as representing the revelatory quality of the created order (188). But Yoder made a significant use of the doctrine of the Trinity in his insistence that once the Jesus of the canon was accepted as the normative revelation of the Father, such appeals to other channels were invalid. (189-91)

This ethics of specific allegiance engaged authority issues: "The Christian community is the only community whose social hope is that we need not rule because Christ is Lord." The church does not simply have a sacred cause, but this cause dispenses it "from pushing people around in unworthy ways." (177) Yoder was not arguing here for a complete renunciation of leadership either in the church or in wider society, but repudiating the drive to acquire political or communal power in the belief that such positions constitute the only means to achieve God's rule. He was exposing the delusion that normally perceived status and power are the keys to the kingdom of heaven.

3.2.4 Ecclesial Pneumatology

The life of the church which Yoder envisioned, faithful in allegiance to its Lord, engaged in mission in the world, and embodying a corresponding ethic, would be completely

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[39] Hauerwas has commented on this: "it should not be thought that Yoder is committing the genetic fallacy by his appeal to the early Christian community. He is not saying that because the early church was a minority it should always be a minority, but rather in this context he is working descriptively to show the change in the logic of moral argument when this occurred. Of course, he will argue that the form of the early church is normative for Christians, not because it was the early church but because what the early church believed is true and results in Christians taking a critical stance toward governmental authorities." (*Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World and Living In Between* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Baker, 1995 {1988}), 189n34). But Yoder plainly stated that he was making a theological (and not descriptive) point. This is borne out at below §6.2.1.

impossible without supernatural empowerment. He did not belabour this point, but at significant places the work of the Holy Spirit was made explicit in these essays.[40] Pneumatology had a higher profile in Yoder's ecclesiology when he was discussing ecclesial practices, as we shall see in the next chapter.

We have already encountered Yoder's belief that the creation of the community of specific allegiance was inaugurated and powered by the Holy Spirit ($3.1.1 and $3.2.3). The impact on the world of the church as God's agent of mission was measured, not in terms of effectiveness or productivity, but by faithfulness as a sign, and it was the work of the Holy Spirit to take up the sign and to apply it to the world. (204) Elsewhere he recognised that the invitation to follow Christ "calls for behaviour that is impossible except by the miracles of the Holy Spirit." (174) Yoder's reluctance to give higher profile to the Spirit when engaging in social ethics may have derived from his awareness of a misuse of the appeal to the Spirit:

> Still another way of defining that "other light" is the claim to immediate revelations by the Holy Spirit. From Montanus in the second century to the "situation ethics" of the mid-1960s, it has been held that if we were to do away with the definite prescriptions of past authority, there would be a clear present authority speaking in our midst, which would give us instructions different from those of past authority. (188, cf. 342)[41]

3.3 Specific Allegiance for the Sake of the World

If we had continued to employ the notion of distinctiveness to characterise the church as an elect and holy community, it would be difficult to formulate any sense of continuity between the church and all beyond its boundaries. However, the choice of "specific allegiance" enables us to see how the church can be part of its Lord's wider purposes, the redemption of all creation. Yoder understood a continuity to exist between the church and world which necessitated its involvement with the wider community which could be

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[40] There are frequent references to the Spirit in "Sacrament as Social Process" (360-373) which largely formed the basis of *Body Politics*, as we shall see in chapter 4.

[41] It is worth comparing this caution with Yoder's analysis of different understandings of 'Spirit' in the Reformation period in "'Spirit' and the Varieties of Reformation Radicalism" in *De Geest in het geding* edd. I. B. Horst, A. F. DeJong & D. Visser (Alphen aan den Rijn: H. D. Tjeenk Willink, 1978), 301-306.

characterized as "the nations." But how was this continuity to be perceived and distinguished from the discontinuities required by specific allegiance? His treatment of the appeal to the incarnation illuminates the problem of appealing to the doctrine of creation to establish this continuity when that creation is fallen and rebellious. Instead, he established this continuity by appeal to Jesus' Lordship over the "powers." I will subsequently explore how he understood the relationship between church and culture, and in particular the relationship between church and state.

The way in which Yoder dealt with the incarnation when lecturing to the Episcopal Peace Fellowship illustrates his critical engagement with the tradition of his audience.

> It is especially from the Anglican tradition that the rest of us have learned something of the persuasive intellectual power of the idea of the Incarnation.[42] It has been a most impressive vision, to say that all human concerns have been divinely sanctioned and hallowed by God's coming among us, taking our flesh. (172)

But he insisted that this action did not sanction everything that was going on in the world or make all human activity a means of grace. When God came among the human community there were certain practices and loyalties which God rejected; there was a discontinuity with a world after the pattern of Abraham and the Exodus. "When we speak of Incarnation it must not mean God sanctifying our society and our vocations as they are, but rather God's reaching into human reality to say what we must do and what we must leave behind." (172) Thus Incarnation cannot be used as a model of how God's people should embrace the whole of life unless the quality of the incarnate life is made specific in terms of faithfulness: "In a world that is not yet the kingdom of Christ, it is through the initiative of the Incarnation that we can trace the reality of human obedience." (172) Since the beginning of Christendom Christians had felt they needed to provide religious resources for the morality of Everyman, and so the church had favoured the role of chaplain. (173) But instead of trying to be "the soul of the existing society," the church was called to be "the beginning of a new kind of human relations," (178) reflecting the way of Jesus with his new community.

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[42] Brian Horne alerted me to the fact that this was eclipsed during the eighteenth Century when the Calvinists were in the ascendancy.

Ultimately, the church engages with the world because its Lord is Lord of the world, despite appearances to the contrary. This was the approach of the church in its early years, though in traditional Protestant usage, divine dominion over the rebellious world has been designated Providence or divine overruling.[43] To understand the structures of the present world order, Yoder found more helpful the Pauline expression, the "principalities and powers," understanding these to have both human and superhuman dimensions.[44] The victory of Christ over the powers had brought forth the new creation of the church in which the old barriers maintained by the powers, such as Jew and Gentile, had been broken down.

> It is thus a fundamental error to conceive of the position of the church in the New Testament in the face of social issues as a "withdrawal," or to see this position as motivated by the Christians' weakness, by their numerical insignificance or low social class, or by fear of persecution, or by scrupulous concern to remain uncontaminated by the world. What can be called the "otherness of the church" is an attitude rooted in strength and not weakness. It consists in being a herald of liberation and not a community of slaves.[45]

Here we have come very close to the heart of all Yoder's theology.[46] At the cross and in the resurrection, together the culmination of the whole of his life and teaching, Jesus revealed and defeated all those powers which distort creation and divide humanity. His new creation is nothing less than a new humanity no longer bound to those distortions and divisions; its calling is to embody that reconciliation won by its Lord in order to witness to his achievement to the world which is currently in rebellion against him.

> The church must be a sample of the kind of humanity within which, for example, economic and racial differences are surmounted. Only then will it have anything to say to the society that surrounds it about how those differences

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[43] Yoder noted this in *The Christian Witness to the State*, 11.

[44] Yoder translated Hendrik Berkhof's short but significant book *Christ and the Powers* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald, 1962, 1977[2]). He drew on this for his eighth chapter, "Christ and Power" in *The Politics of Jesus*. A significant correspondence took place between Yoder and John Stott, the leading evangelical Anglican, on this subject during the late 1970s, in which Yoder found 1 Cor 2:4-8 particularly significant and maintained that an insistence on a solely superhuman reading of the powers was a product of post-platonic cultural developments. For a brief, but insubstantial critique of Yoder's view, see P. T. O'Brien, "Principalities and Powers: Opponents of the Church," in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church: Text and Context* ed. D. A. Carson (Exeter, Devon: Paternoster, 1984), 110-150, here 122-24.

[45] Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 148.

[46] "It would not be too much to claim that the Pauline cosmology of the powers represents an alternative to the dominant ("Thomist") vision of "natural law" as a more biblical way systematically to relate Christ and creation." *The Politics of Jesus*, 159.

> must be dealt with. Otherwise preaching to the world a standard of reconciliation which is not its own experience will be neither honest nor effective.[47]

The calling of the church to specific allegiance to its reconciling Lord is required by its continued sojourn amidst a world full of conflict. In order to extend his reconciling work to the world without replicating its conflict it must refuse all other ultimate allegiances. Yet, in as much as the church's mission is to extend the reconciling work of its Lord to the world, it engages with the world out of love for it.

3.3.1 Church and Culture

Yoder repeatedly engaged with H. Richard Niebuhr on this subject, eventually publishing a long essay "How H. Richard Niebuhr Reasoned: A Critique of *Christ and Culture*."[48] I shall mention only some elements of his profound critique here, and incorporate remarks pertinent to ecclesiology. This subject takes us back to Yoder's understanding of the engagement of Christian theology with the Hellenistic intellectual milieu.

Yoder first noted that those Christians who appear to be categorized in one of Niebuhr's first four types ("Christ against, of, above, in paradox with Culture") might not feel adequately represented by his description. He then exposed how the entire presentation was set up so as to predispose the reader to see the superiority of the fifth type ("Christ the transformer of culture"): "almost all readers decide that "transformation" is what they believe in." (51) But one of the most significant weaknesses of the typology was the vagueness of the all-embracing term "culture." All Christians had differentiated between particular aspects of culture in practice. Even the most world-affirming had rejected attendance at Roman games at which fellow Christians had been thrown to animals. Even the most world-denying had happily embraced certain cultural pursuits: Mennonites were excellent farmers (and farming was part of culture). Christians who ran their own schools or economies were culturally

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[47] Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 150f.

[48] In *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture*, Glen H. Stassen, D. M. Yeager & John Howard Yoder (Nashville, Ten.: Abingdon, 1996), 31-89, to which page numbers in this subsection refer.

productive.[49] The issue, then, became one of how Niebuhr's category of transformation should itself be transformed.

Thus the cultural strategy of the Christian church would not be uniform, but discriminatory. It would reject some elements of culture (pornography, tyranny, cultic idolatry), while accepting others within clear limits (economic production, commerce, the graphic arts, paying taxes for peacetime civil government). To other dimensions the Christian faith gave a new motivation and coherence (agriculture, family life, literacy, conflict resolution, empowerment), whilst it stripped others of pretensions to autonomous truth and value (philosophy, language, Old Testament ritual, music). Some forms of culture had been created by Christian churches (hospitals, service of the poor, generalized education, egalitarianism, abolitionism, feminism), and some with special effectiveness by the Peace Churches (prison reform, war sufferers' relief, international conciliation). (69f) Even if Christians felt compelled to withdraw from certain cultural practices because of their pretensions to autonomy (Mammon, the state, the family), they were not leaving the world but influencing it (as in the New Testament the "world" meant culture as self-glorifying or autonomous - rebellious, oppressive). Even where there was such rebellion that Christians were compelled to withdraw from certain segments of "culture," the New Testament still affirmed that the world continued to be under the lordship of Christ. The task of the church was not to attempt to take over the rebellious world on its own terms, nor to adopt a position of resigned irrelevance, but rather to represent a real judgement upon the rebelliousness and a real possibility of reconciliation for all. (70f)

Yoder reasserted the significance of the church, something Niebuhr had failed to recognise in Christian decision making about culture. The church was a sociological unit

> distinguishable from the rest of culture and thereby constitutes a new cultural option.... Suffering love can be seen as the way to which Christians are called, without our expecting the rest of society all to share in a radical obedience for which it is not prepared. (75)

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[49] A second powerful theological critique has been mentioned in §3.2.3 above: Yoder exposed the way in which Niebuhr sought to play off the persons of the Trinity against each other such that the teachings and example of Christ needed to be corrected by appeal to nature and history.

Christians were committed to take evil more seriously than Niebuhr implied (89), but also the creative empowerment of the Spirit (73).

Finally, Yoder presented his own understanding of how the apostolic witnesses addressed the world around them with the proclamation of the Gospel, by considering a wide spectrum of New Testament texts.[50]

> A handful of messianic Jews, moving beyond the defence of their somewhat separate society to attack the intellectual bastions of majority culture, refused to contextualize their message by clothing it in the categories the world held ready. Instead they seized the categories, hammered them into other shapes, and turned the cosmology on its head, with Jesus both at the bottom, crucified as a common criminal, and at the top, preexistent Son and creator, and the church his instrument in today's battle.
>
> It is not the world, culture, civilization, which is the definitional category, which the church comes along to join up with, approve, and embellish with some correctives and complements. The Rule of God is the basic category. The rebellious but already (in principle) defeated cosmos is being brought to its knees by the Lamb. The development of a high Christology is the natural cultural ricochet of a missionary ecclesiology when it collides as it must with whatever cosmology explains and governs the world it invades.[51]

It was Yoder's high Christology which drove his theology: all else in the rebellious world was to be submitted to his lordship.

3.3.2 Church and State

Yoder's work in this area[52] derived from his understanding of the powers.[53] Unlike the

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[50] In "But We Do See Jesus" (*The Priestly Kingdom*, 46-62), Yoder engaged with five texts from different authors: Jn 1:1-14; Heb:1:1-2:9; Col 1:1-28; Rev 4:1-5:4 and Phil 2:5-13 (50-52). In "How H. Richard Niebuhr Reasoned," he added to these the "principalities and powers" literature in Paul and the speeches of Paul to pagans in Acts 14 & 17 (85-6).

[51] Yoder, "But We Do See Jesus," *The Priestly Kingdom*, 54.

[52] Limitations of space prevent a full exposition and discussion of Yoder's view of the state, so I will limit myself mainly to some remarks on the relationship between church and state. I make most use of the essay "The Otherness of the Church," which originated in 1959 and was republished in *The Royal Priesthood*, 54-64, to which the page numbers in this subsection refer.

[53] Oliver O'Donovan, in his *The Desire of the Nations* (see above n 23), has criticised Yoder for inconsistency on this point, but has again failed to read Yoder carefully enough. On p 151 he accuses Yoder in his treatment of Romans 13 in *The Politics of Jesus* of having broken with his earlier views, such that "the reference to Christ's triumph and the state's subjection, or semisubjection" was absent. This is a gross failure to read Yoder's second paragraph on p195 which did exactly this, appealing to Hendrikus Berkhof, G. B. Caird and Oscar Cullmann. The suggestion that Yoder had made a major break with his earlier interpretation is itself an indication that O'Donovan has failed to grasp Yoder's careful historical exegesis. I do not propose to engage with O'Donovan further on the state.

church, the state "belongs with the other *exousiai*" which are no longer conformed to the creator's intent (56). However, its

> belief in Christ's lordship over the *exousiai* enabled the church, in and in spite of its distinctness from the world, to speak to the world in God's name, not only in evangelism but in ethical judgement as well. The church could take on a prophetic responsibility for civil ethics without baptizing the state or the statesman. The justice the church demanded of the state was not Christian righteousness but human *iustitia*; this it could demand from pagans, not because of any belief in a universal innate moral sense, but because of its faith in the Lord. (56)

Some clarification of Yoder's use of the term "human *iustitia*" is required at this point, since it might appear to constitute an appeal to natural law, and thus form a contradiction with the remainder of his sentence. Yoder was quite clear that there was no definitive revelation of God's will outside Jesus Christ, so that the principles of Christian righteousness could not be appropriated by humans who were in rebellion against God. When God's will was communicated to such humans, mediately (through the believing church), account was taken of their unbelief. Thus Christians were required to translate the general relevance of the lordship of Christ for a given social-ethical issue into concrete terms, comprehensible to the unbeliever. These "middle axioms" were formulated "in pagan terms (liberty, equality, fraternity, education, democracy, human rights)."[54] We could think of this as an expression of divine accommodation to the unbeliever. Thus the church's demand for "human *iustitia*" from the the state was the employment of a pagan concept as a means of accommodating to its ethical short-sightedness.[55] We may continue with Yoder's train of thought:

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[54] *The Christian Witness to the State*, 32, 73. The expression "middle axiom" has been criticised on the grounds that an axiom should be basic, not 'middle'; "but even principles derivable from others can be described as axioms if they are treated in practice as basic." Richard L. Sturch, s.v., "Axiom," *NDCEPT*, 181.

[55] Stanley Hauerwas, (*After Christendom? How the Church is to behave if freedom, justice, and a Christian nation are bad ideas* (Nashville, Ten.: Abingdon, 1991), 60, is alert to the danger encountered by well intentioned people who have taken the path of assuming that Christians share "a general sense, if not conception, of justice in our society that allows us to work for common goals," adopt some contemporary theory of justice, and then see no need to check back to Christian convictions. But Yoder himself was far too well grounded in and committed to a distinctive Christian outlook to fall into this trap. He reflected on his use of terminology: "Some have warned me that it is dangerous to borrow such worldly words as "egalitarianism" or "freedom" since those concepts are not only hard to define but are the property of the liberal establishment, which is an oppressive elite. These friends are right in thus warning me. If I were to

Thus the visible distinctness of the church and world was not an insouciant irresponsibility; it was a particular, structurally appropriate way, and the most effective way to be responsible. This attitude was meaningful for the church because it believed that the state was not the ultimately determinative force in history. It ascribed to the state at best a preservative function in the midst of an essentially rebellious world, whereas the true sense of history was to be sought elsewhere, namely in the work of the church. This high estimate of the church's own vocation explains both its visible distinctness from the world and the demands it addressed to the world. The depth of the church's conviction that its own task was the most necessary enabled it to leave other functions in society to pagans: the church's faith in Christ's lordship enabled it to do so without feeling that it was abandoning them to Satan. (56)

By now the reader may be in need of a definition of Yoder's term "the world," and he soon provided one:

> It follows from the "already, but not yet" nature of Christ's lordship over the powers that there is no one tangible, definable quantity that we can call "world." The *aion houtos* is at the same time chaos and a kingdom. The "world" of politics, the "world" of economics, the "world" of the theater, the "world" of sports, the under-"world," and a host of others - each is a demonic blend of order and revolt. The world "as such" has no intrinsic ontological dignity. It is creaturely order in the state of rebellion; rebellion is, however, for the creature estrangement from what "really is"; therefore, we cannot ask what the world "really is," somehow "in itself." This observation is borne out by the New Testament's use of a multiplicity of terms, most of them in the plural, when speaking of the world. All that the Powers have in common is their revolt, and revolt is not a principle of unity. Since the Prince of the Power of the Air is a liar from the beginning, he cannot even lie consistently. Only the lordship of Christ holds this chaos of idolatrous "worlds" together. (56-7)

Yoder contrasted this early view with that which came to be held by the time of Augustine: whereas the church and world had been visibly distinct, with the Christianization of the Roman empire they became fused. However, it was clear that the world had not through its compulsory baptism become Christian, and thus emerged the

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think that those contemporary terms have univocal normative meaning, and if I were proposing that they simply be "baptized," I should have sold out. But those warning friends are wrong if they suggest that some other, less liberal words (for example "virtue," "narrative," "community") would be safer from abuse. The right corrective is not to seek fail-safe words never yet corrupted but rather to renew daily the action of preempting the extant vocabulary, rendering every creature subject to God's rule in Christ. What is needed is to surface the criteria whereby we can tell whether, in the appropriation of each new language, the meaning of Jesus is authentically reenacted or abandoned." (*The Royal Priesthood*, 370).

doctrine of the invisibility of the true church in order to accommodate a subsequent vague distinction between church and world.

> Previously Christians had known as a fact of experience that the church existed but had to believe against appearances that Christ ruled over the world. After Constantine one knew as a fact of experience that Christ was ruling over the world but had to believe against the evidence that there existed "a believing church." Thus the order of redemption was subordinated to that of preservation, and the Christian hope turned inside out.[56] (57)

Yoder went on to criticise the Reformers who decided in favour of political conservatism for failing to resolve the church-world confusion. Thus they expressly rejected the conviction that the center of the meaning of history is in the work of the church. The appeal to the

> order of creation, in which they placed the state and the vocations, could with a turn of the hand become the deistic order of nature or the atheistic order of reason without any change in its inner structure... It was, therefore, precisely the attempt of the Reformers to maintain the medieval ideal and to lay claim on the autonomous dynamics of state and profession that led to the secularization that defines the modern period. (60f)

He could say in 1960 that it was still a deeply rooted axiom that "for all practical purposes there is really no actual presence of non-Christians in the total society, that is to say, that the totality of Christians and the total society are to be seen as one (*Corpus Christianum*)." This meant that the "*distinction between an ethic of the state and Christian duty*" was inconceivable, indeed ethically wrong. Yet once one became aware of this all-dominating assumption, the significance of the actual minority position of the churches became plain. Then the Christian could both recognise that any given system of government was a form of non-faith and selfishness (especially when it resorted to the sword), and accept that given system as a defence against an even worse disorder on the grounds of the lordship of Christ over the state.[57] The lordship of Christ over the state was mediate whilst that over the church was immediate through the Spirit. "The purpose

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[56] Yoder acknowledged that "the medieval church maintained significant elements of otherness in structure as in piety, which are generally underestimated," and that "these preserved an awareness, however distorted and polluted, of the strangeness of God's people in a rebellious world." (58)

[57] Yoder, "On divine and Human Justice," published in *On Earth Peace*, ed. Donald F. Durnbaugh (Elgin, Ill.: Brethren, 1978), 197-210, here 203 and 210.

of Christ's dominion over the *exousiai* and over the states is not to bring in the Kingdom, but simply to keep things from falling apart so that the Church can do the work of the Kingdom." Thus the church could address all who were state functionaries: any Christians, with a call to a discipleship of love and nonresistance; all who refused the lordship of Christ, with a call to *iustitia.* [58]

Yoder's view of the state has been criticised by sympathetic readers. Hauerwas suggests that "the achievements of more progressive forms of justice" indicate that the state cannot be based entirely in sin.[59] Nigel Wright characterises Yoder's view of the state as "an accommodation to sin rather than a "pure" ordinance of God," and identifies the requirement of a theological judgement on the state's ontology within God's good creation.[60]

> Yoder acknowledges within the state the existence of authentic, created values of peoplehood ("ethnicity, a sense of place and forms of community") but finds these fused with the claims of rulers and of states to sovereignty. He can argue that sociality as a created good may include pressures and sanctions to teach and motivate wholesome behaviour but not that the state's created "nature" demands the sword. With no epistemologically reliable access to the original creation, the evidence suggests that the fallen powers are inherently warped. Grounding a state metaphysically gives it authority independent of Christ. There is no "legitimate state" metaphysically distinguishable from actual states which are ambivalent political realities internally composed of competing forces.[61]

He finds that Yoder's emphasis on redemption is not intrinsically neglectful of creation since Christ is agent of both,[62] yet concludes that Yoder's "emphasis upon the fallenness of the powers overshadows their createdness and redeemability," and identifies here a tendency to "ecclesiological docetism."[63] From a consideration of the dialogue between Yoder and Richard Mouw, he identifies a tension between Reformed approaches to the

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[58] Yoder, "The Theological Basis of the Christian Witness to the State," published in *On Earth Peace*, ed. Donald F. Durnbaugh, 136-43, here 140, 141, 142.
[59] Stanley Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue: Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981 {1974}), 218.
[60] Nigel G. Wright, "Disavowing Constantine: Mission, Church and the Social Order in the Theologies of John Howard Yoder and Jürgen Moltmann," (King's College, University of London: unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, 1994), 97, 99.
[61] Wright, 99f.
[62] Ibid., 105.
[63] Ibid., 105-7.

state which take seriously their created nature and Anabaptist approaches which focus on the fallenness of the world system of which the state is most expressive to the detriment of its creation.[64] He finds helpful the work of Walter Wink who writes that

> the invidious "either/or" of the debate leaves us either abandoning the Powers to secularity or installing an establishment Christianity.... Instead of these two extremes, the New Testament view of the Powers gives us a broad continuum of possible emphases, adaptable to every situation. There are no pre-packaged answers to tell us how Christians should engage the powers... all live in a paradox of "as if not", as being in but not of the Domination System. "Come out of her, my people" (Rev 18:4) may be our marching orders but so may be the call to assume secular office (as with Joseph and Daniel). Spiritual discernment takes the place of fixed rules.[65]

Now in his own way Yoder rejected the invidious "either/or" of the debate. He was aware of historical specificity in his discussion of attitudes to the state in Anabaptism:

> There is a considerable difference in local situations so that involvement-in-tension in one place, moderate involvement in another, and uninvolved witness might all be expressive of the same basic ethical view. When Menno Simons said a Christian can be in government if he does not apply the death penalty, and Michael Sattler said a Christian cannot be in government because it does apply the death penalty, they do not necessarily have different views of Christian ethics. They may have been responding to different experiences of government.[66]

Thus Yoder's position could value secular office so long as it was compatible with allegiance to Jesus as Lord. But this condition (allegiance to Jesus) was the measure of the legitimacy of the secular agency as expressive of the creator's intent. To deny that there is epistemologically reliable access to the original creation outside the lordship of Christ does not suggest that the fallen powers are *inherently* warped, or totally resistant to the Lordship of Jesus at work through them (I suspect that Wright's criticism of Yoder's position is a product of his preoccupation with ontological categories). It does maintain that state agents often do not recognise when they are warped, when their

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[64] Ibid., 224-9.
[65] Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 84. D. H. Williams has recently criticised Wink's panentheistic worldview as gnostic; *Retrieving the Tradition & Renewing Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1999), 211.
[66] Yoder, "Reformed Versus Anabaptist Social Strategies: An Inadequate Typology" *TSF Bulletin* 8/5 (1985), 2-7, here 6.

preoccupations are self-regarding and their methods travesties of creation.[67] Yoder was repudiating indiscriminate involvement in government, aware of the dimension of the powers, and particularly aware of what they did to Jesus, and of his warning to his disciples. From the point of view of an ecclesiology based in specific allegiance to Jesus Christ, it is understandable that "emphasis upon the fallenness of the powers overshadows their createdness and redeemability."

It is worth considering the recent observation of Lutheran scholar, Walter Pilgrim:

> In the New Testament as a whole, the portrait of the government is not that of a benevolent power at work in the world but a problematic, often hostile, potentially unjust and tyrannical human structure. Christians need to be constantly on the alert against its temptations and abuses. When necessary, in fact, the church must be ready to oppose the state and bear the consequences.[68]

To seek an amelioration of this position on the grounds of a theology of creation is to run the risk of assuming that what benevolence the church may experience at the hands of the state is a product of state altruism. Far more likely is the possibility that the church has become complicit with exploitative and corrupt aspects of state affairs and is failing in its prophetic witness. If the New Testament writings are normative for the church, Yoder's position is more convincing than Wright's.

3.3.3 The Centrality of Ecclesiology for Theology

Yoder's emphasis upon the specific allegiance of the church did not mean that he isolated the church from the unbelieving world. He established links between the church and the world on the basis of Jesus Christ, who became incarnate, and who was Lord of the World as well as Lord of the church. Thus he made little appeal to the doctrine of creation. Indeed,

> historical study shows that it has been possible to understand under *order of nature* just about anything a philosopher wanted; stoicism or epicureanism, creative evolution or political restorationism, Puritan democracy or Aryan

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[67] See Yoder, *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald, 1971), 59-60.
[68] Walter Pilgrim, *Uneasy Neighbours: Church and State in the New Testament* OBT (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 186.

> dictatorship. We shall do well to avoid thinking of the order of nature as a source of any kind of revelation.[69]

This was not a denial of the creative intention of God as the foundation of human society, but a recognition that in a fallen creation, the church must look to its Lord for its model of obedient humanity lived amongst a recalcitrant world. Thus, although the doctrine of creation was significant enough to be adopted in describing the fruit of Christ as the new humanity, the ambivalence of the appeal to creation in a fallen world without the measure of the incarnate Lord rendered it an unsuitable systematic centre. Jesus Christ was the starting point of Christian theology.

Given Jesus Christ as the starting point, our discussion of the relationship between the church and the wider world should have established the centrality of ecclesiology for the whole of Yoder's theology. It might be thought that a key move in the Anabaptist position would be the denial of a union between church and state. But he insisted that this was a subsequent move. The "rejection of the church-state tie was never debated in its own right by the Anabaptists or their followers. It was a reflection of or deduction from their concept of the nature of Christian discipleship and community."[70] Yet the emphasis upon the specific allegiance of the church did lead to the rejection of the link between church and state, initiated by Constantine and continued by the Magisterial Reformers. At the heart of what Yoder called the "Constantinian temptation" lay the assumption that "the true meaning of history, the true locus of salvation, is in the cosmos and not in the church. What God is really doing is being done primarily through the framework of society as a whole and not in the Christian community." (198) Ecclesiology had a key place in relation to ethics, eschatology, other religions or cultural ethos:

> the most important error of the Christendom vision is not first of all its acceptance of an ethic of power, violence and crusade; not first of all its transference of eschatology into the present providence of God working through Constantine and all his successors in civil government, not its appropriation of pagan religiosity that will lead into sacerdotalism and sacramentalism, not in its modelling church hierarchy after Roman administration, nor any other specific vice derived from what changed about the nature of the church with the epoch

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[69] Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State*, 34.

[70] Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood*, 67. Page references in this subsection are to this book.

> of Constantine. Those were all mistakes, but they were derived from the misdefinition of the place of the people of God in the world. (109)

3.4 The Primacy of the Local

Yoder was committed to the unity of the church. His in-depth involvement for many years in ecumenical discussions and his ecumenical essays testify to that commitment. But, as I will show in the first subsection, he insisted that the ecumenical process must give priority to the local level. In the following subsections I describe two methodological stances consistent with this insistence on the local which pervade his overall work.

3.4.1. The Ecumenical Imperative and Task

Dismissing concern for unity on the grounds of mere good manners, efficiency or fringe benefit, Yoder asserted that "The unity of Christians is a *theological* imperative first of all in the sense that its reasons arise out of the basic truth commitments of the Gospel and the church's intrinsic mission."[71] From John 17:20ff he demonstrated that Christian unity was a Trinitarian imperative; it was "to make credible the fundamental Christian claim ("that the world might believe," said twice) and to reflect the nature of the unity between the Son and the Father, to render that credible witness substantial." (291) From Ephesians 2-3 he demonstrated that God's cosmic purpose was to make known his wisdom to the "principalities and powers" by making one humanity out of Jew and gentile. Thus, "Where Christians are not united, the gospel is not true in that place." (291) He frequently appealed to the biblical image of the body of Christ. (293, 299) Furthermore, unity could not be merely spiritual, it must be visible. (234) Such a theological starting point meant that Yoder could dismiss the pluralist view that unity could be based on the achievement of human agreement (effectively "the sociological form of works religion"). Within the fundamental unity of the church the New Testament celebrated a diversity

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[71] Yoder, "The Imperative of Christian Unity" in *The Royal Priesthood*, 290-299, here 291. Again, page references in this subsection are to this book.

amongst the membership of the one body, but pluralism was "diversity without unity, variation without asking the truth question." (293)

Yoder made criticisms of the organized mainstream of contemporary ecumenical expression because it was an outworking of the magisterial conception of the church as a structure for the administration of preaching and sacrament or for the implementation of common goals. The path to unity thus became a matter of negotiations between structures of government, using councils to arrive at a unified organ of church government. Apart from significant practical limitations of this approach to ecumenism, he could point to two theological deficiencies. To begin with, the differences between many denominations were hardly theological:

> The real divisions in the churches are between rich and poor, between liberal and conservative, between races, between east and west. These divisions go down through the middle of existing denominations and are the separations that really would demand reconciling initiative. (234)

Then in addition, the strategy of merger, when taken alone, failed to deal with the problem that created the division in the first place.

In an essay prepared for a symposium on the Baptist contribution to ecumenism in 1980, Yoder commented on the historical difficulties that have beset attempts at institutional union, and on moves in the United States towards "grassroots" expressions of unity:

> Now certainly the response to the challenge of this time is not to say that a Baptist convention or a Mennonite general conference or assembly (for which our own stated ecclesiologies have no clear explanation) are more valid forms for church unity than are the structures of other denominations. The need would be to find ways - and they must be new ways - to formulate our forebears' claim that all over-arching or conventional structures are provisional and derivative (not, as with the Landmarkers and Churches of Christ, that they are non-existent - a stance impossible to make credible), so that the separateness of Christians that is a scandal to the world is not first the separateness of those agencies. Let congregationalism again be an affirmation instead of a demurrer, and a whole new universe of ecumenical agenda would open up, in which precisely the "free churches" should be most at their ease. (274)

About the same time he was writing elsewhere:

> Mutual recognition as Christian ecclesial fellowships need not be identified with or boiled down to the narrower questions of the recognition of specific ordained

ministries or of other sacramental practices.... [though these issues] may still need debate and adjudication in particular cases. A Baptist congregation can recognize an Anglican congregation as a body of Christian believers and not necessarily have to grant that infants baptized in the Anglican communion are fully qualified for adult membership in a Baptist congregation without further confession of faith.... The ongoing debate about specific orders and sacraments is, then, subsequent to, rather than prior to, the affirmation of parish to parish commitment...." [72]

With these observations in mind, how might there be access to unity and what human processes could form the way to that goal? Firstly, the congregationalism of the free church tradition (in its more sober and rational form[73]) located authority among congregations whose members knew one another well and took responsibility for one another. Thus local ecumenical gatherings could themselves become expressions of the local church, and this gave them more weight than ecumenical agencies which met only infrequently and could have only a limited experience of community. Thus, the congregational view gave a high place to ecumenical gatherings:

> The "high" views of ordered churchdom can legitimate the worship of a General Assembly or a study conference only by stretching the rules, for its rules do not foresee ad hoc "churches"; thoroughgoing congregationalism fulfils its hopes and definitions whenever and wherever it sees "church" happen. (236)

Secondly,

> The believer's churches are committed to the discovery of a unity that is *personal*. One does not so much encounter another tradition as encounter a brother or sister. Ecumenical experience in every tradition testifies to this fact: but the free church is committed to it as an axiom... the life of the free church begins with fraternal address, with the discipline of responsibility for the reconciling of the estranged brother or sister. (240)

From Matt 18:15-20 Yoder emphasised a deliberative process, undertaken in the name of Christ and the power of his spirit, intended to produce agreement (*symphonein*).[74] (292)

> If, [in contrast with the evasive tactics mentioned earlier]..., we see clash and reconciliation, accusation and repentance as the more fundamental model, we will want to clarify differences rather than fuzz them over. We will put the truth

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[72] Yoder, "Could There Be a Baptist Bishop?" (editorial) in *Ecumenical Trends* 9 (July-August 1980), 104-107, here 105.

[73] Here Yoder repudiated the extreme doctrinaire form of congregationalism of the "landmark" movement which claimed that only the loyal gathering should be called a "church" (235, cf., 266n4).

[74] See further §4.1.1.

> question and the repentance question at the fundamental point, though being very slow to name that point. (293)

Again church unity arose from the Lordship of Jesus Christ recognised in the work of the Holy Spirit:

> If our claim is that the Word we serve is everywhere accredited by the Holy Spirit, then a mark of its authenticity will be our renouncing any of the tools of privilege and power in defining it. What is wrong with the use of the sanctions of Caesar to support the uniformity of the church is not that it sins against some modern vision of the separation of the realms of church and state; it is that it qualifies the universal authority of the risen Lord and short-circuits the dialogical freedom whereby God the Spirit brings her people to unity. It thereby imposes in a given time and place formulations from other times and places, which could not make their way in the open kind of conversation reported in Acts 15 and prescribed in 1 Corinthians 14. (314)

Besides the admonitory or deliberative processes already mentioned, Yoder saw the functioning of the Spirit in charismatic empowerment of every member exercised in the unity of the body.

> Each of these modes of the spirit working was, in the twelfth or sixteenth or eighteenth century as in the first, countercultural and socially subversive, yet in no sense ahistorical or anarchic. Each demands congregational location. None is according to the New Testament description the possession of clergy. The kind of "wholeness" they represent is denied by any clericalism that claims that being "church" can be authenticated by criteria applying only to priestly leadership. They have been denied systematically, although not always expressly, by the magisterial definers of ecumenical priorities. (317)

Thus Yoder saw the unity of the church as a vision to be embraced in a manner "primarily procedural" rather than formulaic (319).

How may this view of the ecumenical process be assessed? From the conventional perspective it does not deal with the institutional denominational divides. Yet it is consistent with Yoder's overall ecclesiology, so that it must be taken seriously if the previous moves discussed in this chapter hold good. Many Christians do experience a local form of ecumenism which makes genuine progress where conventional official procedures grind slowly or fail altogether. There is little doubt that without these local initiatives formal denominational unions would be hollow, and until Christians can discover a commitment to each other which transcends those differences between them,

the language and institutions of unity will not convince the watching world that the church is a conflict-resolving community. I will return to the issue of Christian unity when I deal with the subject of Catholicity in §6.3.2.

3.4.2 Specific Allegiance Responds to Foundationalism

Already, in dealing with the issue of culture, we have begun to engage Yoder's treatment of theological method. To address the situation of the church faced with the pluralism and relativism of a post-modern culture, he considered the possible options facing members of the church in adapting to the challenges of the wider world, and then drew on the model of the apostolic witnesses. The issue was not *whether* to be involved in the wider world, but *how* to be there:

> how in the transition to render anew the genuine pertinence of the proclamation of Christ's Lordship, even in a context (*particularly* in a context) where even the notion of such sovereignty is questionable... Pluralism/relativism as a pervasive meaning system is not, like Kantianism or Thomism, a total seamless unity; it is more, like Greek or Fortran, a language. We are now called to renew in the language of pluralism/ relativism an analogue to what those first transcultural reconceptualizers did; not to translate their results but to emulate their exercise.[75]

This is why Yoder would not accept as normative the creeds of the fourth and fifth centuries - they were only partly successful products of a previous attempt to engage a rebellious intellectual culture.

> The last thing we should ask, then, would be whether we can translate into our time from theirs the notion of preexistence or of the participation of the Son in creation. That would be to contrast the rules of the two language worlds instead of finding a message to express within both... What we need to find is the interworld transformational grammar to help us to discern what will need to happen if the collision of the message of Jesus with our pluralistic/relativist world is to lead to a reconception of the shape of the world, instead of... rendering Jesus optional or innocuous. (56)

Yoder rejected the way of absolute, unique or universal claims (the epistemology of the establishment, or of the vain effort to create an invulnerable metalanguage) and instead advocated the way of witness to the particular Jesus, without absolute proof .

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[75] Yoder, "But We Do See Jesus," *The Priestly Kingdom*, 56. Subsequent page references are to this essay.

> By confessing that Messiah has been placed by God above and not within the cosmology and culture of the world they invade, the messianic Jewish witnesses also affirmed that under his lordship that cosmos will find its true coherence and meaning. To use the example of Colossians, the powers are not merely defeated in their claim to sovereignty, and humbled; they are also reenlisted in the original creative purpose of the service of humanity and the praise of God. Or in John, the logos/sophia vision of the rationality of the universe and of history is not only dethroned but is also put to work illuminating everyone who comes into the world, and empowering sons and daughters. To know that the Lamb who was slain was worthy to receive power not only enables his disciples to face martyrdom when they must; it also encourages them to go about their daily crafts and trades, to do their duties as parents and neighbors, without being driven to despair by cosmic doubt. Even before the broken world can be made whole by the Second Coming, the witnesses to the first coming - through the very fact that they proclaim Christ above the powers, the Son above the angels - are enabled to go on proleptically in the redemption of creation. Only this evangelical Christology can found a truly transformationist approach to culture. (60f)

This path would involve the making of tactical alliances with certain apologetic thrusts, with some liberation language or with "pluralist/relativist deconstruction of deceptive orthodox claims to logically coercive certainty" without swallowing their totalitarian pretensions.

> For our world it will be in his ordinariness as villager, as rabbi, as king on a donkey, and as liberator on a cross that we shall be able to express the claims which the apostolic proclaimers to Hellenism expressed in the language of preexistence and condescension. This is not to lower our sights or to retract our proclamation. It is to renew the description of Christ crucified as the wisdom and the power of God. This is the low road to general validity. It frees us from needing to be apologetic in either the popular or the technical sense. It thereby frees us to use any language, to enter any world in which people eat bread and pursue debtors, hope for power and execute subversives. The ordinariness of the humanness of Jesus is the warrant for the generalizability of his reconciliation. The nonterritorial particularity of his Jewishness defends us against selling out to *any* wider world's claim to be really wider, or to be self-validating. (62)

In the essay, "Walk and Word: The Alternatives to Methodologism," Yoder discussed the debates generated by Epictetus about first principles in moral discourse. Observing that the Stoic must have taken for granted a human social fabric, he argued that "The life of the community is prior to all possible methodological distillations." However, he noted that "to make rejecting foundationalism a *basic* defining statement is

itself a foundationalist move." So he resisted having to rank any particular method, maintaining that "Pluralism as to epistemological method is not a counsel of despair but part of the Good News." [76] Thus he was prepared to mix and match according to the shape of a particular debate. What is clear is that the Bible was for him the prototypical narrative of how a value-bound community exercised all kinds of moral discourse (see §6.1). Once again, then, Yoder's primary intellectual obligation was to the community of specific allegiance.

3.4.3 A Specific Sociology for the Church

In order to explore the particular understandings of community and authority within any ecclesiology it is helpful to employ approaches or methods which illuminate the workings (or failings) of the particular ecclesiology. One method of enquiry that might be considered is that of sociology, that branch of the social sciences which studies the patterned regularities which are the consequence of the social relationships and experiences which go to make up human social living.[77] The social sciences are regularly employed by biblical scholars and increasingly by historians of the early church,[78] and it might be thought that their adoption would help to grasp the particular form of human social living known as the church.

However, the question immediately arises as to what extent any particular form of human social living can be illuminated by social sciences which have been developed to account for general categories of society. In as much as the humanity of members of particular groups unites them with non-members, certain aspects of the social sciences may be appropriate to all particular social groups. But to the extent that membership of a

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[76] In *Theology Without Foundations*, edd., Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy & Mark Nation (Nashville: Abingdon), 1994, quotations from 82, 313n6 and 83. Other essays which deal with this subject include "On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel: Particularity, Pluralism, and Validation," *Faith and Philosophy* (July 1992), 285-300, esp. 293; "Meaning After Babble: With Jeffrey Stout beyond Relativism" *JRE* 24.1 (Spring 1996), 125-139, esp. 134f.

[77] This expression is derived from Tony Bilton et al, *Introductory Sociology* (London & Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1981), 2.

[78] E.g. Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

particular group may entail a form of social living which is at variance with that of non-members, the application to this group of such social sciences may be inappropriate and misleading. Thus the particularities of history must be allowed full significance rather than sublimated under the broad application of sociological (or anthropological) theory if justice is to be done to them. Yoder argued, with reference to Michael Gorbachev and the events of the late 1980s in Russia, that while sociology was a science and as such could only "deal with what can be generalized and replicated... history[79] on the other hand is the realm of the unique, sometimes the impossible."[80] The particularities of history may thus be helpful in the search for ways to express the sociology of the church which do justice to its theological nature, so long as it is history freed from Enlightenment assumptions about the involvement of God in the world. Because Yoder held that the emergence of the church constituted a new kind of social reality, he wrote of the requirement for the church to have "an existence, a structure, a sociology of its own, independent of the other structures of society."[81]

The arguments for incorporating sociological approaches and insights into theological work on the Christian community are strong, but equally theologians must insist that sociology cannot displace the significance of theology worked out in relation to particular history.[82] However, precisely because Yoder would not adopt a particular theological method, he did not spell out a sociological method. The nearest that he came to this was the consideration of distinctive church practices which we will examine in the following chapter.

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[79] A better term would have been "historiography" since the comparison was being made with sociology.
[80] "Ethics and Eschatology", *Ex Auditu* 6, 1990, 122.
[81] Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood*, 170, cf. 174. Evidence that he had long thought along these lines comes from "A Clarification of Views of the Church" (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities Study Meeting, Brussels, 1-2 January, 1969, unpublished).
[82] Here John Milbank's work on the origins of social theory is particularly stimulating; *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

4. The Character of the Community: (2) Its Practices

This chapter moves to the second part of the character of the Christian church, Yoder's account of practices within the community. The first section assembles and expounds his work on them. The second section examines the underlying theological moves that inform this detailed description of ecclesial life. The third section moves to a preliminary evaluation of his ecclesiology.

4.1 Body Politics

In 1992 Yoder published a semi-popular treatment of five practices which, he proposed, were central in the life of the early Christian community as far as could be ascertained from the New Testament.[1] He sought to uncover their original meaning, and to recover them for the social, economic and political witness of the contemporary Church. He was, of course, drawing on his thinking over many years, and my account of these practices will make use of his other materials.[2] These five practices were not the only ones that Yoder might have chosen. In fact, he called them "five sample ways" (*ix*) and indicated that others could be considered, such as love of the enemy, truth-telling, freeing slaves and serving instead of ruling (73 and n78). I shall discuss his treatment of other practices in §4.1.6.

In calling this book *Body Politics*, Yoder rejected the common separation of church and politics into distinct realms, and asserted that the church had the character of a *polis*; it was a structured social body, with its own way of making decisions, defining membership, assigning roles, distributing powers, and carrying out common tasks.

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[1] Yoder, *Body Politics: Five practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Nashville, Ten.: Discipleship Resources, 1992) to which page numbers in this section refer.

[2] These five practices had already been treated together (less extensively, and in a slightly different order) in "Sacrament as Social Process," which originated as a lecture in 1986 (drawing on the "Stone Lectures" of 1980 given at Princeton Theological Seminary) and was published in *The Royal Priesthood*, 359-373.

> Politics affirms an unblinking recognition that we deal with matters of power, of rank and of money, of costly decisions and dirty hands, of memories and feelings. The difference between church and state or between a faithful and an unfaithful church is not that one is political and that the other is not, but that they are political in different ways. (*ix*)

The common separation of church and politics had created the problem of how the church should be involved in wider society, but Yoder maintained that

> the will of God for human socialness as a whole is prefigured by the shape to which the Body of Christ is called. Church and world are not two compartments under separate legislation or two institutions with contradictory assignments, but two levels of the pertinence of the same Lordship. The people of God is called to be today what the world is called to be ultimately. (*ix*)

Yoder illustrated the use of each of these practices by the Anabaptists and by other reform and renewal movements. He claimed that they offer a paradigm for the life of the larger society, and suggested that they refocus the traditional understanding of sacraments. I will summarize his account of these practices, giving most attention to those closest to the issue of community and authority.

4.1.1 Community Reconciliation

A common concern of the early Reformers had been to recover the vital moral solidarity of the church through a process which they had called *Regel Christi*. Martin Luther and Martin Bucer had sought to move the Reformation from the university lecture hall and the scholar's office to the life of the parish and family by this means.[3] But it was the Anabaptists who had made this a key feature of their church life. Elsewhere Yoder

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[3] In the Preface to his German Mass (1526), Luther envisaged a hypothetical gathering of Christians committed to this rule. See Ulrich S. Leupold, ed., *Liturgy and Hymns*, Vol. 53 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehman (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965), 63f. Yoder commented slightly more fully on this in "Martin Luther's Forgotten Vision," *The Other Side* (April 1977), 66-70. On Bucer Yoder wrote "A la recherche du Bucer de l'historie," *BSHP* 122 (1976), 490-506. He referred to Bucer's 1539 commitment to church discipline in "Adjusting to the changing shape of the debate on infant baptism" in *Oecumennisme: Essays in Honor of Dr. Henk Kossen*, ed. Arie Lambo (Amsterdam: Algemene Doopsgezinde Societeit, 1989), 210-214, here 207n16 and 212. Bucer acknowledged "the validity of the ban if used sparingly." according to George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Kirksville, Mo.: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1992[3]) 675.

showed that this practice "was an issue in the birth of Anabaptism well before baptism or the church-state link were debated."[4]

The classic text which deals with "binding and loosing" (rabbinic technical terms) in Matt 18:15-20 described a threefold effort at reconciliation. Yoder understood this process as a counterpart of the way God authorized ancient Israel to deal with moral and legal matters (the "two witnesses" of Num 35:30; Deut 17:6; 19:15; cf., Jn 8:17). He noted that it "differs significantly from some understandings of community discipline" in that:

* The initiative was personal, so the one who was to address the offender was the person who knew about the offence, and not necessarily a clergyperson.
* The intention was restorative, not punitive.
* There was no distinction between major offences and minor ones: any offence was forgivable, but none was trivial.
* The intention was not to protect the church's reputation or to teach onlookers the seriousness of sin, but only to serve the offender's own well being by restoring her or him to the community. (2-3)

Of course, various distortions of this process had arisen in church history, particularly when the key function of reconciling dialogue had slipped away from the center of the church's understanding, and it had acquired the label "discipline."[5] Instead, this practice

> is at home in a voluntary community whose members have committed themselves to its standards and to its practice, by means of a personal commitment of baptism or confirmation. We can pursue reconciling confrontation because we trust one another and because we asked to be placed under this kind of loving guidance. To do the same things in a nonvoluntary community gives them quite a different meaning; this is where in our culture the word Puritan got its bad taste. (5)

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[4] Yoder, "The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Willard Swartley (Elkhart, Ind.: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1984), 11-28, here 25 n12.

[5] It should be noted that among the Sixteenth Century Anabaptists, the use of the Ban within families was a matter of painful debate; see, e.g., C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction*, (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora, 1995), 327-37 and 374. Yoder passed over these debates because his book was brief and catechetical in purpose.

The conclusion of the reconciliation process had a more than human validity: "What you bind on earth is bound in heaven" (v18). Yoder took this straightforwardly, albeit startlingly: "The community's action is God's action." Here he departed from the tradition of the free churches which have tended to deny that one human can forgive another in God's name (3), and was prepared to go beyond the language of 'ordinance': "When human and divine activity coincide in this way; that is what some denominations call a sacrament." (1) He thought there was a need to recapture the shock of Jesus' contemporaries when they first heard this assertion:

> the real scandal of the way God chose to work among humans - what we call the Incarnation - is that it was an ordinary working man from Nazareth who commissioned a crew of ordinary people - former fishermen and taxgatherers - *to forgive sins."*[6]

He went as far as to say that

> This mandate makes the church the church. The Greek word *ecclesia* ("church") is found only twice in the Gospels coming from Jesus lips; the two times are the two "bind and loose" passages. The word *ecclesia* itself (like the earlier Hebrew term and Aramaic equivalent that Jesus probably used) does not refer to a specifically religious meeting nor to a particular organization; rather it means the "assembly," the gathering of a people into a meeting for a deliberation or for a public announcement. It is no accident that in Matthew 16 the assignment by Jesus of the power to bind and loose follows directly upon Peter's first confession of Christ as Messiah. The confession is the basis of the authority; the authorization given is the seal upon the confession. The church is where, because Jesus is confessed as Christ, men and women are empowered to speak to one another in God's name.[7]

The authority of the disciples to forgive was to be found in many other places in the New Testament. Apart from the earlier "binding and loosing" saying at Matt 16:19, there was a briefer parallel in Lk 17:3-4 and an even stronger one at John 20:21-23. It was reflected in the only conditional petition of the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:14,15). It was echoed in the Pauline instructions to forgive (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13). In Gal 6:1-2 Paul referred to this process as "the law of Christ," and in 1 Cor 6:1-8 he urged reconciliation amongst

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[6] Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood*, 331.

[7] Ibid., 332. We should note that this follows the classic Anabaptist reading of Matt 16:13-19; the emphasis being on the confession itself, not on the one who confessed (the Catholic reading) nor on the one confessed (the Lutheran reading).

believers by means of a mediator rather than litigation in pagan courts. The epistle of James concluded (5:19-20) with a call to the same process. (3-4). Further evidence of the procedure was to be found in Matt 5:23ff; 1 Cor 5:6ff; 2 Cor 13:1; 1 Tim 5:19f.[8] Yoder was careful to point out that his approach to the biblical texts on this subject was "moderately realistic" rather than "fundamentalist," "restorationist," or "primitivist." He was aware of the problems of reading ancient texts and did not understand them as providing "a rigidly prescriptive and unchanging charter." On the other hand, faithfulness to the New Testament witness included the social shape of the people of God. "Medium and message cannot be divorced." (10-11)[9]

Yoder made some profound observations on this biblical theme of interpersonal reconciliation, drawing upon Mennonite experience of involvement in practical conflict resolution.

> We have here a fundamental anthropological insight into the relationship of conflict and solidarity. To be human is to have differences; to be human wholesomely is to process those differences, not by building up conflicting power claims but by reconciling dialogue. Conflict is socially useful; it forces us to attend to new data from new perspectives. It is useful in interpersonal process; by processing conflict, one learns skills, awareness, trust, and hope. Conflict is useful in interpersonal dynamics, protecting our concern about guilt and acceptance from being directed inwardly only to our own feelings. The therapy for guilt is forgiveness; the source of self-esteem is another person who takes seriously my restoration to community. (8)

Thus conflict with others was part of the human condition, indeed necessary for the human process of maturation. The moral issue was not the existence of conflict but the way in which it was handled, either to the detriment of others in the service of oneself, or to the well-being of others even at cost to oneself.

We saw in the last chapter how this reconciling process was vital to Yoder's understanding of the ecumenical process. He further understood it as the means towards ongoing moral discernment for the Christian community as it encountered new and unforeseeable challenges in which its standards were clarified and modified, if need

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[8] Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood*, 334, 336, 331.
[9] On Yoder's approach to Scripture, see further below, §6.1.

be.[10] Drawing on the Jewish model of the elders' and rabbis' development of the moral tradition which allowed for fine-tuning and updating through exchange about its contemporary application, Yoder believed that "the Christian community is equipped not with a code but with decision-making potential." (8)

How could all this be possible? - how could human forgiveness be divine? - how could human discernment and decision-making be divine guidance? In another place he wrote that the conflict management process was normal both inside the life of the Christian community and as Christians dealt with the outside world:

> That is part of the Christian experience of the Holy Spirit. That's when the Holy Spirit is there; when you're doing real business with each other on matters of differences and offences, and reaching reconciliation."[11]

This ecclesiology was inextricably pneumatic. Amidst the realities of the conflict which were essential to the development of human community and maturity, the promised Holy Spirit guided into all truth (Jn 16:12) through a fully human communication process. In relation to Jn 14:26; 16:12ff and 20:23, "It can be argued that in the New Testament the gift of the Spirit is more often spoken of in connection with discerning and forgiving than (as in Acts 1:8) in relation to witnessing."[12] The empowerment to discern could be observed in the Jerusalem Council with its conclusion; "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and us." (Acts 15:28)[13]

Yoder believed that the adoption of this "Rule of Christ" could regenerate pastoral care and congregational decision making. "It can challenge both making forgiveness an automatic routine, as is the danger in some rituals of reconciliation, and making it too dear, as amongst the second-century Christians who would permit it only once." (11) He

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[10] The words "bind" and "loose" had to do with moral discernment as in "forbid"/"allow", as much as forgiveness and reconciliation (see *The Royal Priesthood*, 327-9). "The promise of the presence of the Holy Spirit is clearly correlated in the New Testament with the need for the church prophetically to discern right and wrong in the events of the age. Not all visible events are God at work, not all "action" is divine, not every spirit is of Christ (1 Cor 12:3; 1 Jn 4:1)." (ibid., 94)

[11] Yoder, "A Theological Point of Reference for an Approach to Conflict, Intervention, and Conciliation," (Unpublished draft based on remarks made at the Mennonite Central Committee Peace Theology Consultation in Kansas City, 6-8 April 1978, last updated 1996), 4.

[12] Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood*, 337.

[13] Yoder acknowledged "The guidance is not only procedural; there are substantial prescriptions as well. We are told to tell the truth, to keep promises, and to care for the needy." (*Body Politics*, 9)

observed that in the United States and Canada there was a largely church-based organisation rooted in this gospel mandate, named Victim Offender Reconciliation Program, whose volunteers, with the authorization of the courts, negotiated between offenders and victims for some kind of restitution for crime, either supplementing, mitigating or replacing state sanctions. Such initiatives demonstrated how the church can model for the world "what both are called to be and to do." (13) I shall return to this practice in $4.2.4.

4.1.2 Community Economics

From the subsequent behaviour of the disciples, Yoder took Jesus' so-called words of institution ("Whenever you do this, do it in my memory") to mean "whenever you have your common meal"; that is "their ordinary partaking together of food for the body." (16) This, he thought, was borne out by the connection between the resurrection appearances and the eating of food in the Gospels, the accounts of meals and the disputes that arose from eating together in Acts, together with the instructions concerning table fellowship in 1 Corinthians (chapters 8 & 10 as well as 11).[14] "In celebrating their fellowship around the table, the early Christians testified that the messianic age, often pictured as a banquet had begun." (18) Of course, there were the dimensions of thanksgiving and Passover, focused on remembering Jesus' death, but Yoder wanted to emphasise the economic reality of sharing sustenance. In Paul's instructions, "discerning the body" (1 Cor 11:29) referred not so much to the relation of Jesus' presence to the bread, as to the body of the church, a church united across a spectrum of economic resources. When the early Christians broke bread together they were not merely eating symbolically in memory of their master's death, they were living out his way of life and death, extending to a wider circle the economic solidarity which normally obtained in the family.

Yoder did not spell out how the church might reappropriate this practice. Many churches today have discovered the value of eating meals together: picnics and potluck

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[14] Whether the eucharist separated from the agape meal in New Testament times or soon after is a matter of complex historical debate. For a discussion see I. Howard Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* (Exeter, Devon: Paternoster, 1980), 130-133; and more recently, Eleanor Kreider, *Communion Shapes Character* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald, 1997), 38-43.

lunches after church and Harvest festival suppers. Yet these are generally understood as separate from the real business of liturgical worship. Only in the concept of church in the home, as expounded by Robert and Julia Banks, are meals considered an expression of worship.[15] Yoder perceived that this sacred-profane divide has had far-reaching consequences:

> By interpreting the early Christian meals as set-apart religious rituals, as Christians have been doing since the early Middle Ages, or by trying to interpret them through the narrow focus of a single annual Passover model, we have been enabled to duck their impact for social ethics, first in the church and also in the world.... The newness of the believing community is the promise of newness on the way for the world. That in the age of the Messiah those in bondage will be freed and the hungry will be fed is also a criterion, though a distant one, for political economics beyond the circle of faith. (21)

The gospel vision of economic sharing carried with it a rejection of social stratification, but it has had to be continually rediscovered throughout history by radicals such as the *pauperes Christi*, in northern Italy in the eleventh century, Peter Waldo, Francis of Assisi, Peter Chelcicky, the *Bruderhof*, and the English "Levellers." (23) Thus Yoder understood breaking bread together as expressing an economics of the kingdom which was rooted in the biblical Jubilee tradition. (24-5)[16]

In obedience to, and in memory of, its Lord the visible church was to live out this vital dimension of God's rule, a sacrament of what the world would one day enjoy. He rejected the appeal to the autonomy of each realm of culture made by some Lutherans, as well as the appeal to "sphere sovereignty" by some Calvinists, in order to justify conformity with the economic stratification of society. The appeal to the order of creation was naive, since sin's entry into the world meant that much of creation was disobedient to God and oppressive to humans. Instead, Christians were to appeal to the decisive standard of the Gospel and "plant signs of the new world in the ruins of the old." (25-27)

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[15] Robert & Julia Banks, *The Church Comes Home* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1998[2]). After I had presented a paper at the Research Institute of Systematic Theology at King's College on 27 May 1997, John Zizioulas agreed with me that the *eucharist* would be best celebrated in the setting of a meal.

[16] Yoder wrote most fully on the Jubilee in *The Politics of Jesus*, chapter 3.

4.1.3 Community Boundary

Each community requires some notion of a boundary within which it exists and beyond which others do not belong.[17] Yoder's choice of membership of the church in terms of personal allegiance to Christ meant that baptism became the ritual marking transition across the boundary. Drawing on 2 Cor 5:17 (see §3.1.2) together with Galatians 3 and Ephesians 2, he emphasised the new kind of social relationship that existed between all baptised Christians overarching the differences which had previously separated them.[18] "Baptism introduces or initiates persons to a new people. The distinguishing mark of this people is that all prior given or chosen identity definitions are transcended." (28) Paul's vision went beyond the hope of Western culture that humanity's divisions might be overcome by the individual leaving behind particular identity in order to join in the "melting pot". Instead,

> two peoples, two cultures, two histories have come to flow into one new humanity, a new creation. The order is thus the reverse of our modern expectations. There is a new inter-ethnic social reality into which the individual is inducted rather than the social reality being the sum of the individuals. This new belonging provokes subjective faith, but is not the product of the individual's inward believing. (30)

Paul had proclaimed that the messianic age had already been begun as a work of God; that the church was the new society, a trans-ethnic community, and as such was the model of harmony for the whole world. (37) But subsequent developments in church history had subverted this vision of the church:

> After the second century, the previously porous border between the church and the Jews was closed so that the lived meaning of the Pauline age was impossible. After the fifth century there were no more outsiders to convert because the whole world had been declared Christian by imperial edict. (32)

This required the development of a "sacramentalist" understanding of baptism, already shorn of social implications. But in the age of Renaissance, Huldrych Zwingli took a new, cognitive approach to baptism which looked for what the symbol signified. Yoder

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[17] For one sociological approach which emphasises the concept of boundary see Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London & New York: Routledge, 1985).
[18] See further §5.3.2. I do not intend to expound here all that Yoder had to say about baptism, particularly adult baptism. Significant essays were published in *The Royal Priesthood*, but also to be noted is "Adjusting to the changing shape of the debate on infant baptism" (see note 3 above).

pointed out that this approach failed to illuminate the social nature of baptism; it did not make the world new. (33)

He recognised that modern egalitarianism came mostly from Enlightenment humanism (with its partly Stoic heritage and its appeal to creation); it could not come from the churches which had lost the missionary meaning of baptism. Yet the appeal to the "self-evident" implications of creation had been unable to transcend racism. In contrast, Paul's message of harmony was grounded, not in creation (as in some other theological traditions), but in redemption. So Yoder appealed for a return to the earlier sacramental view of baptism which proclaimed and celebrated that a change in identity, understanding and behaviour was possible for all on the basis of what God had begun. This return would recapture the original gelatinization of prior stratifications. (33)

Yet Yoder realised that the contemporary task of the church required both ecumenical negotiation and recognition of specific cultural situations. For example:

> We must grant that, despite the correlations in the fourth century or the sixteenth, believers' baptism in itself is not a sure cure. 'Believers' Baptism' in the 'Bible Belt' or in a defensive Mennonite or Pentecostal subculture may be more a confirmation of thisworldly values than a challenge to them.[19]

He called for the Believers' churches to be less timid in assisting the mainline churches to find new forms of believers' baptism appropriate to an increasingly post-Constantinian era.[20]

4.1.4. Community Roles

Yoder argued for a new mode of group relationships in the church.[21] The original pattern in at least the Pauline churches was that every member of the body had a distinctly identifiable, divinely validated and empowered role as a result of the triumph

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[19] Yoder, "Adjusting to the changing shape of the debate on infant baptism," 211f.
[20] Ibid., 214
[21] The chapter on this subject in *Body Politics* also introduced some of Yoder's arguments concerning leadership, but although the subjects of roles and leadership are linked I believe that focussing on each in different places brings greater clarity. So I shall mainly deal with the subject of leadership and authority in chapter 7.

of Christ (Eph 4:11-13; Rom 12:3-6; cf., 1 Pet 4:9ff), rather than that roles, and thus power, were concentrated in the hands of a few.

> When Paul was writing, this pattern for the definition of roles in the group differed profoundly from the patterns that already were present in his world, just as it differs profoundly from our own. Sharing roles was not a culturally available social model... it had not already existed or functioned before. It rather had to be achieved by Christ: it is part of the triumphal procession of YHWH/Adonai leading captives in his train and sharing with his people the booty of his victory. (48-9)

The first challenge to this divine distribution that was reflected in the New Testament appeared at Corinth where a few Christians believed that their ministry was more "spiritual" than that of other members. Paul set about correcting this unbridled enthusiasm with the first use of "body" language, saying that each member of the body had been given some gift by the Spirit (1 Cor 12:7), and thus reciprocal recognition of all by all was appropriate. He recognised that, despite the intrinsic equal dignity of all gifts, there were "some values that take priority over others within the deliberative assemblies of the *ecclesia*" (such as rational, edifying communication and the orderly arrangement of the communication process). (50) Paul also changed the tone of the interchange by replacing the word *spirit* with *gift*, thus focusing on the giving Spirit rather than the human claimant. (51)

Soon, however, another kind of function came to be overvalued in the church: that of the religious professional (usually male), accredited by succession, by rituals of installation, or by the possession of tradition. As in so many cultures, Christendom came to be dominated by the role of the priest. Nevertheless Paul's pattern of shared roles had been anticipated in certain ways in ancient Israel.

> Moses was not a priest; he let his brother, Aaron, and then the Levities do those rituals. On the advice of his father-in-law, Moses farmed out to others the role of adjudicating conflicts (Exodus 18). In Numbers 11 at Yahweh's instruction Moses called seventy men to share with him the Spirit's empowerment: "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets!" (11:29)
>
> Throughout the Israelite story, the activities of prophets, judges, and "elders at the gate" gelatinized the centrality of the ritual life although they still honored it. After the end of kingship and the loss of the Jerusalem temple, Jewry survived, not by creating a surrogate for the Temple so as to keep using the priesthood, but by inventing a new role, that of the rabbi, steward of the Torah,

> and as a new social instrument, the synagogue, formed of any ten households, with no religious specialist needed in their midst at all. (55-56)[22]

Of course, in Christendom there were kings, judges, lawyers and others in leadership roles, but this was a reflection of the power of the Old Testament model which had been adopted for the whole society, rather than a reflection of a diversity of roles amongst members exercising a ministry within the church, such as the New Testament model would suggest.

While Paul's call for order was important, it was issued subsequent to his assertion that gifts had been given to everyone, and so a contemporary implementation of Paul's concerns would

> renew the underlying understanding of the Spirit's work, which created the vitality that then needed to be called to order... we need to challenge the concentration of authority in the hands of office bearers accredited on institutional grounds. To do so we need to renew the original vitality that Paul had needed to rein in only after it began to overreach itself. (51)

The church must accept "the challenge of creating structures congruent with the promise of universal ministry."[23] At this point I will delay consideration of the implications of this understanding of roles in the community for its leadership, since it is one particular focus of this study and requires specific attention in chapter 7. Meanwhile I should describe Yoder's fifth practice which provided some guidelines for the structures for which he called.

4.1.5 Community Process

How should the community conduct its meetings in a manner which is open to the workings of the Spirit, rather than confining that work to a solitary leader figure? Yoder began with the instructions about a church meeting in 1 Corinthians 14, with its provision of freedom for all to speak, and requirement on all to weigh what was said.[24] Paul's

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[22] It must be said that the origin of the term "rabbi" is obscure; its currency in the gospels indicates an informal honorary title, see R. Reisner, s.v. "Teacher" in *DJG*, 807-11. On the origins of the synagogue see §7.2.4.

[23] Yoder, "The One or the Many?", 54.

[24] Yoder previously discussed this practice in "The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood" in *The Priestly Kingdom*, 28-30.

concern was for intelligibility and order, but he made no reference to a single moderator governing the process. "The same assumptions about the nature of a meeting were operative behind the narrative of Acts 15" (62), and in the synods or councils of the early centuries, though they lost the openness and spontaneity of that Jerusalem event (63).

In 1523 Huldrych Zwingli had appealed on two occasions to this passage in defence of his authorization to preach by the City Council of Zürich, against John Faber, the representative of the Bishop of Constance. However, once he had the city fathers on his side, Zwingli equated them exclusively with the elders of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15), provoking objections from his followers and initiating the division which would lead to the birth of Anabaptism. At about the same time Luther had written a tract entitled, "That a Christian Assembly or Congregation has the Right and Power to Judge All Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Discuss Teachers, Established and Proven by Scripture."[25] Yoder commented:

> All across the beginning Protestant movement, we can observe the same theologically motivated conviction about the process whereby God's will is made known. Independently in all the early Protestant movements this conviction was understood to be prefigured in and mandated specifically by 1 Corinthians 14. Consensus arises uncoerced out of open conversation. There is no voting in which a majority overruns a minority and no decision of a leader by virtue of his office. The only structure this process needs is the moderating that keeps it orderly and the recording of the conclusions reached. (67)

Such radically reformed ideas reached England in the form of a Puritan vision of hearers freely gathered under the preaching of the Word being free to talk back to the expositor since he was their servant, rather than a mouthpiece for the king, bishop or university. It was a strong emphasis in Congregationalism and other more radical groups. Quakers allowed space in their meetings for anyone to contribute and maintained "no formal difference" between a meeting for worship, for deliberation or for mission. (67-8)

That truth might be found in open conversation could be extended beyond the messianic community on the grounds that, "in the age of Jesus the Messiah, the healing resources of his ministry can by the nature of things reach farther than the knowledge of

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[25] This is to be found in *Luther's Works*, Vol. 39 Church and Ministry 1, ed. Uric W. Gist, general ed. Helmut T. Lemmas, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 301-14.

his name and that among these healing resources is the commitment to hear not only the neighbor but even the adversary." (69) Here Yoder considered Gandhi's life as "experimenting with truth," and Liberation Theology's "epistemological privilege of the oppressed."

The systematic point here was twofold: first, the Spirit spoke to and through every church member; second, Jesus Christ was always and everywhere the same, and thus Yoder could write that

> any procedure that yields sovereignty to the direction of his Spirit will have ultimately to create unity. What does not create authentic unity is the centralized power tactics of the Caesars, the Inquisitors, or any other patriarchs or paternalists. A monarchical decree is quicker than careful listening, but is usually wrong. (70)

Of the Anabaptists, he observed that

> It is a basic novelty in the discussion of hermeneutics to say that a text is best understood in the congregation. This means that the tools of literary analysis do not suffice; that the Spirit is an interpreter of what a text is about only when Christians are gathered in readiness to hear it speak to their current needs and concerns.[26]

But could the radical congregationalism which must result from this view deal with the problems of Christian unity on a broader scale? Yoder's answer to this was to show that the Anabaptists were the first segment of the Reformation to establish a synodical order and practice. The two "synods" of Schleitheim (February 1527) and Augsburg (August 1527) settled the major issues endangering the unity of the movement, crossing national and provincial boundaries in a way that the magisterial structures never did. Michael Sattler's cover letter to the Seven Articles of the Brotherly Union understood that God had been at work in the meeting at Schleitheim since persons who had been initially of diverse opinions had been led to unity "without contradiction." Such meetings of the gathered congregation must be understood as part of salvation history.[27]

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[26] "The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists," 21. Francis Watson has written along similar lines in a discussion of the dialogical process of interpretation arising from 1 Corinthians 14 in *Text, Church and World* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 115-123.
[27] "The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists," 24.

4.1.6 Other Practices

In earlier papers Yoder had considered several other practices which were drawn mainly from the teaching of Jesus.[28] In addition to "binding and loosing," breaking bread and baptism, he included the following:

* *Teaching*. This involved a process of testing on the part of the learner in order that he could take up his history anew by drawing on the language of the Christian tradition. The sacramental form of such teaching was Scripture.
* *Praising God*. This involved the participant in a process of recital and it was experienced as a reaffirmation of identity since thanksgiving lay at the heart of what it meant to be human. The sacramental form of praise was the Psalter.
* *Service*. This involved the process of suffering in order to put the needs of brother or sister before those of self. The sacramental forms of servanthood were the basin (Jn 13) and the cross.
* *Following Christ*. This involved a process of forsaking the good for the best, and carried the meaning of imitation of (or participation in) Christ. Its sacramental form was that of leaving the plow behind.
* *Greeting the brothers and sisters*. This reflected a life of mobility and cosmopolitanism in which the experience of Christian fellowship continually widened. Sacramental forms of this expression of unity were the kiss and the sandal plus satchel.

The practices of shared leadership and communal decision-making did not appear in this earlier list. It is clear that Yoder changed the way in which he presented his ideas on the subject of the practices over the years. But the changes are perhaps due most to choice of emphasis to accord with the particular goals of his papers, lectures and books. We may observe that, while the five practices which he chose to expound in 1992 form major aspects of the sociology of the community of specific allegiance, the five further practices outlined briefly here were also significant in his estimation. But it would be mistaken to infer that he maintained some sort of hierarchy of practices, or that he

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[28] Yoder, "Second Draft of "Theses" on the definition of the Free Church Vision," (Dean's Seminar, May 30, 1968, unpublished).

thought there were exactly ten definitive practices which constitute the church![29] Yoder's whole approach was to be specific and concrete about practices which characterised the life of the church, yet without providing overly neat definitions and insisting on completeness. He took the Scriptures seriously without lapsing into legalism: he looked to the work of the Spirit without losing his moorings in the life and words of Jesus.

4.2 Underlying Theological Moves

Each of these community practices was rooted in the order of redemption.[30] The Church's first allegiance was to its Lord, known in his distinctive life in the world; his practice of and teaching about community as portrayed in the Gospels must be determinative for the church. Apart from shared ministry and congregational decision making (practices 4 & 5 above), each of the practices which Yoder described was, according to Ross Bender,

> drawn primarily from the injuctions of Jesus rather than from an analysis of the congregations of the New Testament church... [and thus stand] prior to the development of any institutional or sacramental forms and provides criteria by which to judge their appropriateness.[31]

Of course, the books of the New Testament were understood as the product of various writers, inspired by that same source, engaging with the struggling and frequently imperfect churches of the first century. Counterparts to practices 1, 2 and 3, derived from the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels, are referred to in the epistles. Practices 4 and 5, which Yoder derived from the Epistles and Acts, could only apply in the historical situation following the earthly ministry of Jesus, and reflected the dynamic reality of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church.

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[29] I would want to include hospitality as an important practice, though it could be included in the wider economic implications of Yoder's practices of the communal meal and of greeting the brothers. See John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* OBT (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

[30] Yoder said this explicitly in, "Sacrament as Social Process," in *The Royal Priesthood*, 371.

[31] Ross T. Bender, summarizing Yoder in *The People of God: A Mennonite Interpretation of the Free Church Tradition* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald, 1971), 144.

Yoder followed the Anabaptist tradition of a thoroughly Christological and Pneumatological hermeneutic, understanding the Old Testament as fulfilled in the New Testament[32], so that the church should not be structured after an Old Testament pattern, but rather as the community of the Holy Spirit. This discussion of ecclesial practices has brought three further issues to light.

4.2.1 The Language of Sacrament

Yoder was content to use the language of sacrament in his discussion of the practices, but his usage was significantly unconventional. His was a considerable critique of traditional notions of sacraments in that he added three (or even more) practices to the traditional Protestant pair, baptism and the Lord's supper. He defined these practices sociologically, rather than semantically or philosophically,[33] yet he could say that they were not "religious" or "ritual" activities at bottom, but rather "lay" or "public" phenomena.[34] So they could not be confined within a special spiritual realm but must be extrapolated into the "politics" of the rest of the "real world." (88n77) In the area of ecclesial anthropology,

> in contrast to the standard account, none of these practices makes the individual the pivot of change. The individual is in no way forgotten or gelatinized; nothing could be more particularly tailored to measure than the notion of every member's possessing (or being possessed by) a distinctive charisma. Nothing empowers more potently than saying that in the meeting everyone can take the floor. But no trust is placed in the individual's changed insides (as does pietism) to change the world. The fulcrum for change and the forum for decision is the moral independence of the believing community as a social body. The dignity of the individual is his or her uniqueness as specific member of that body.[35]

We have seen that Yoder illustrated how his five main practices formed a bridge from the faith community to other social structures. Believers did ordinary things differently for Jesus' sake: forgiving one another, fraternizing trans-ethnically, sharing their bread. These were visible activities which "lend themselves to being observed,

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[32] On hermeneutics see §6.1.
[33] Yoder, "Sacrament as Social Process," 369.
[34] Ibid., 370.
[35] Ibid., 371

imitated and extrapolated;" they were not opaque religious rituals. (75) Thus, although the community of specific allegiance was sociologically defined in terms of its distinctive practices, it was not thereby separated from other communities and their practices. On the contrary, through them the Lordship of Christ reached out beyond the church into the world.

Could we say, then, that by faithful practice, inspired by the Spirit, the church might be God's activity in the world, could itself be understood as a sacrament? To consider the church as sacrament was the stance of Sixteenth Century Anabaptists:

> The Anabaptists were living in the late medieval religious and intellectual world. The incarnational question was very much alive for them as a result: In what way may God be said to be present here and now to humanity, in Christ? Is God made present in the Spirit, in the Word, in the church, or in all three? The medieval church had claimed that the Body of Christ was made physically present to human kind in the elements of the Mass. This the Anabaptists denied. They argued that Christ had "ascended to heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father." But all the same, many Anabaptists insisted that there *was* a physical presence of Christ on earth, and that was the true church itself, present in Christ's members. When we read Anabaptist statements describing the church as the Body of Christ, and individual believers as members or limbs of that Body, we tend to take this as an extended metaphor, not a literal description. There is much evidence to suggest, to the contrary, that for many Anabaptists it was intended as a literal description, and not a metaphor at all. As ecclesiology assumed more importance, so too did a sacramental conception of the church.[36]

While the Anabaptists generally agreed with Ulrich Zwingli in the rejection of the sacramental mediation of grace, there was one important figure in the second phase of Anabaptism who "moved the Anabaptist discussion back again towards the Catholic sacramental insight."[37] Pilgram Marpeck mediated between spiritualistic and legalistic extremes in the movement in South Germany and Austria during the period 1530-56.[38] Marpeck insisted that the practice and expression of divine love could not exist in splendid isolation, but must take place within the community of love in ceremonies which are remembrances, pledges and memorials of Christ's historic love for humanity.

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[36] Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 355.
[37] Ibid., 361.
[38] An excellent recent biography is by Stephen Boyd, *Pilgram Marpeck; His Life and Social Theology*, (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992). An edited translation of Marpeck's writings is by William Klassen & Walter Klaassen, *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck* CRR Vol. 2 (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald, 1978).

But, much more than this, they were physical means of growth into divine love and the mature spiritual life: "they have been presented by Christ as a medicine and as a means to our salvation in order that we strengthen our human weakness."[39] As Snyder observes, Marpeck's

> insistence on the integrity of the spiritual and physical dimensions of creation was grounded in an appreciation for the deeper meaning of the incarnation. The only way to salvation, Marpeck would affirm in many of his writings, is through the *humanity* of Christ; consequently, the human dimensions of the Body of Christ also form a crucial and continuing part of Jesus' mission to the world.[40]

Thus Marpeck was able to challenge the dualistic presuppositions of the spiritualists, whereas Menno Simons, who inherited a Melchiorite Christology (which opposed the physical and spiritual dimensions of reality), had overly high expectations for the obedience of the church as the pure Bride of Christ. Marpeck took account of the need of believers to grow in Christian love, and saw the practices of worship, love and service as the means of such growth. He thus "tempered the perfectionist, sectarian tendency that had been part of Anabaptism from the start and that asserted itself increasingly in the ongoing Anabaptist ecclesiological traditions."[41]

Yoder's reinterpretation of the term sacrament is a different move from that of Marpeck,[42] extending it in terms of the impact of the practices beyond the church. He did not make the move from speaking in sacramental terms of the practices as social processes to speaking of the church itself as a sacrament, perhaps because this would have seemed to require an ontological move. He preferred to remain with the particular and concrete, and to avoid sweeping generalities.[43] I find both these understandings of sacrament persuasive, helpful and not incompatible.

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[39] Marpeck in Klassen & Klaassen, 105.
[40] Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 361.
[41] Ibid., 362.
[42] Mark Thiessen Nation has expressed the view to me that Yoder, under the influence of the Anabaptists apart from Marpeck, seems to have followed the Zwinglian rejection of any mystical notion of the communion.
[43] At the end of *Body Politics*, Yoder refused to claim that his exposition of the five practices had uncovered "a deep logic in the nature of things", yet he went on to say he would not be surprised if there were such a deep structure (80).

4.2.2 The Fall of the Church

But once the church ceased to be the community of specific allegiance, shifted the character of those distinctive practices (though maintaining their outward form), lost the balance between the words of her Lord who instituted the practices and the lifegiving presence of the Spirit who works through them, the church was in jeopardy.[44] Was there a point in history beyond which the church, though continuing in outward form at least some of the practices, lost vital touch with the words and life of her Lord through the living presence of the Spirit?

In *Body Politics* Yoder occasionally remarked upon several developments in the life of the church which undermined the original meaning of the practices; some second century rituals of reconciliation would permit the practice only once (11), the restoration of the monopoly of the priestly role, allied to the sacral notion of kingship by Constantine (57). His frequent reference to renewal movements in church history implied that much of the significance of the practices which he advocated had become obscured before recovery. In chapter 6 I shall return to this subject and Yoder's critique of "Constantinianism," but it is clear that he was exploring the idea that something went wrong with the church even before the fourth century. The key to this was the deep divide between ongoing Judaism and the Church. At a number of places in *Body Politics*, Yoder referred to the Jewish heritage of the church and he was particularly interested in the sociological pattern of the synagogue as a resource for church practices (56). This was such an important element in his thinking and engages important wider developments in theology that I must devote chapter 5 to it.

4.2.3 The Centrality of Conflict-Resolution

Having expounded Yoder's views on the practice of reconciliation earlier, I now wish to point out its central place in his ecclesiology. I have already quoted his claim that "This mandate makes the church the church." Theologically, this practice embodies the way of Christ in the church which confesses him as Lord.

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[44] That this could be true at a local level is evidenced by the letters to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation (2:1-3:22).

The readiness not only to forgive but to make forgiveness the instrument and the standard of all church experience is of a piece with the broader theme of suffering servanthood, the theme that stretches from Hosea and Isaiah 42, 49, 52-53 through Christ himself to the cross bearing of his disciples.

Forgiveness is not a generally accessible human possibility; it is the miraculous fruit of God's own bearing the cost of human rebellion. Forgiveness among us also costs a cross. One can go to one's brother or sister only as God came to us: not counting our trespasses against us. Forgiveness does not brush the offence off with a "think nothing of it"; it absorbs the offence in suffering love.[45]

In §3.3 I maintained that close to the heart of Yoder's theology was Christ's lordship over the powers. Although he did not draw it out, this affirmation entails the radical reassessment of the identity of the enemy. A number of scholars have argued that the central section of Luke's Gospel (9:51-19:44) uses Deuteronomy as a literary model. Having positively assessed this view, Mennonite New Testament theologian, Willard Swartley, shows that there is both continuity and change between the orders of Moses and those of Jesus.

> In every case where Deuteronomy prescribed death for what might contaminate the community, Luke's Jesus calls for a reversal of values: the enemy Samaritan is the neighbour who models the Shema; repentance of sinners is the new way to prohibit evil from consuming the community; and laws on clean and unclean are stood on their head. When the peace offer/greeting is refused, wiping out the village is replaced by wiping off the dust from your feet as you leave. Also in the primary conceptualization of the "enemy" we see a major transformation. For us, people are not the enemy, but Satan is the one dethroned in Jesus' vision of victory.[46]

Followers of Jesus thus are called to reconceptualize the enemy. If Christians could learn to regard fellow church members with whom they are in conflict, not as enemies, but as brothers or sisters to be loved and forgiven, if they could see that the true enemy is Satan who seeks the downfall of the church, then they could engage in this process of conflict-resolution and would have a true gift for the world.

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[45] Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood*, 352.

[46] Willard M. Swartley, *Israel's Scripture Traditions and the Synoptic Gospels: Story Shaping Story* (Peabody, Ma.: Hendrickson, 1994), 131-2.

The significance of this practice in Yoder's thinking may also be gauged from the fact that he wrote about it so much. His first publication on it was in 1964.[47] The fullest treatment was a repeatedly issued study outline, entitled "Binding and Loosing."[48] He appealed to Matt 18:15-20 or the practice of "binding and loosing" in many of his treatments of ecumenism[49] and briefer references to its significance appear in essays on broader topics.[50]

The centrality of this practice of reconciliation in Yoder's ecclesiology has led me to characterise his understanding of the church as "The conflict-resolving community." This practice is particularly relational as it concerns inter-personal breakdown, painful feelings, costly initiatives and a careful progression to minimise damage, but we have seen that it also witnesses to a profound anthropology and vision of community.[51] In the history of the church it has been possible to turn the practice into a casuistic disciplinary procedure, but this has been to depart from the clear teaching, not only of Matt 18:15-20, but many other parts of the New Testament. Of course, the other practices are also vital, but they too must be suffused with the inter-personal dynamics which are intrinsic to this practice. For instance, the eucharist has throughout church history become so formalised (once shorn of its meal context) that its community dimension has become incidental, and this contributed significantly to its becoming highly privatised and individualised.

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[47] Yoder's first publication on Matt 18:15-20 was "Christian Discipline" in *The Gospel Herald*, August 18, 1964. He had written a draft chapter entitled "Binding and Loosing" for a never published book in 1963.
[48] This was published for the first time in *Concern* 14 (February 1967), but received wide circulation as an appendix in John White & Ken Blue *Healing the Wounded: The costly love of church discipline* (Leicester: IVP, 1985), 211-234. It was included in *The Royal Priesthood*, 323-358, and was chosen for the collection *Virtues & Practices in the Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics after MacIntyre* edd. Nancey Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg & Mark Thiessen Nation (Harrisburg, Pa.: TPI, 1997), 133-160. It appeared in a different, briefer form as "The Gift of Reconciliation," chapter 10 of *He Came Preaching Peace* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald, 1985), 116-122.
[49] See "The Contemporary Evangelical Revival and the Peace Churches," in *Mission and the Peace Witness: The Gospel and Christian Discipleship*, ed. Robert L. Ramseyer (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald, 1979), 68-103, here p99; also the following essays in *The Royal Priesthood*: "The Free Church Ecumenical Style" (232-241), 241; "Another "Free Church" Perspective on Baptist Ecumenism" (263-276), 265; "The Imperative of Christian Unity" (290-299), 292; "Catholicity in Search of Location" (301-320), 317.
[50] I have found it given significant attention in the following "The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood," "The Kingdom as Social Ethic," and "Radical Reformation Ethics," all published in *The Priestly Kingdom*, 26-28, 93 and 118. Also in "A People in the World" in *The Royal Priesthood*, 82-3; "The New Humanity as Pulpit and Paradigm," and "Are You the One Who Is to Come?" in *For the Nations*, here 43-44 and 217.
[51] See the quotation above from *Body Politics*, 8 in §4.1.1.

Now many have responded favourably to the call of John Zizioulas for a recovery of "the lost consciousness of the primitive Church concerning the decisive importance of the *eucharist* in ecclesiology."[52] I believe that Yoder's emphasis upon the centrality of conflict resolution provides a vital balance to this Orthodox emphasis, holding the human relational process alongside the liturgical. Both are doxological, for to embody the gospel in human acts of conflict resolution brings glory to God as much as does human celebration of the divine act of conflict resolution in the death of Jesus, though in a different way.[53]

The influence of Yoder's work in this area is beginning to become evident. The important work of Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, draws on "Binding and Loosing" at a crucial stage.[54] David Augsburger has employed Yoder's early published work in this area as part of his valuable discussion of new approaches to the practice of forgiveness.[55] I began my research looking for an ecclesiology which nourishes a true depth of community, and now believe that this practice is central to such an ecclesiology. I believe that further consideration of Matthew 18:15-20 can throw light on its theological facets, and so include the following excursus.[56]

Excursus: The Theological Matrix of Matt 18:15-20

In §2.1.2 I criticised Volf for taking Matt 18:20 as a starting point for his ecclesiology and ignoring the prece ding verses. I now wish to demonstrate why the passage 18:15-20 must be read as a theological unity by exploring the echoes of Scripture which it evokes, and also to show that it should be read in an even wider context in Matthew's Gospel. Some New Testament scholars have treated verse 20 as a rather isolated unit, but David

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[52] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir's, 1985), 20f).

[53] According to John Milbank, "Augustine believes that the form taken by true worship of the true God is the offering of mutual forgiveness in the community, and at one point he associates absence of the practice of forgiveness ('true sacrifice') with the absence of monotheism." *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 409.

[54] L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1995), 188-197.

[55] David Augsburger, *Helping People Forgive* (Louisville, Ken.: Westminster John Knox, 1996).

[56] Since "Binding and Loosing" was intended for practical use in church study groups, Yoder did not treat the passage in anything like the way which I propose.

Kupp, in his recent treatment of Divine presence in the whole of Matthew's Gospel, has argued that

> Matthew 18:20 is linked sequentially and causally to the preceding subjunctive sequence in vv. 15-19 by its opening conjuction, γάρ. This causal connection makes Jesus' promise of presence in v. 20 the basis for the authority with which the ἐκκλησία acts and makes decisions: *because* Jesus is in their midst, 'his people' (cf. 1:21) can gain back the offending brother who listens and shun the one who does not, they can bind and loose, and they can agree and request, all with the approval of his Father in heaven. Thus the presence of Jesus becomes heaven's link with the earthly gathering. This heavenly ratification of the decisions of his gathered people reinforces Jesus' anticipated role as their mediator and implies an ongoing role for his divine filial agency.[57]

This is an important emphasis upon the immediate literary context of verse 20, but I believe that the link between the ecclesial practice of conflict-resolution and the presence of Jesus which may be discerned in these verses (and their literary context) can be shown to lie at the heart of the traditions of Israel.

E1. Literary Context and Structure

We must begin with the widely accepted claim that vv.15-20 are set in a literary unit which extends to the whole of chapter 18.[58] There may be several sub-units in the first twenty verses of this chapter, though there is something of a break after v. 20. But the repeated expression "my father in heaven" in vv. 10, 14,[59] 19 & 35 ties vv. 21-35 to the verses that precede them. In a redactional study arguing for unity of composition across 17:22-18:35, William Thompson argued cogently that repetition of phrases suggests a literary structure as follows:[60]

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[57] David D. Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel: Divine presence and God's people in the First Gospel*, SNTSMS 90 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), 182. For a much more speculative attempt to reconstruct sources, communities and practices behind the Matthean text, see now Dennis C. Duling, "Matthew 18:15-17: Conflict, Confrontation, and Conflict Resolution in a "Fictive Kin" Association," *BTB* 29 (1999), 4-22. It has become common among some scholars to use the sociological term "fictive kin" with reference to household terminology in the New Testament, yet this is to neglect the theological notion of God's family which is not fictive, but transcends biological/sociological kinship. See below, §7.2.5.

[58] The majority of commentators see chapter 18 as the fourth of five discourses in the Gospel. See R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Exeter, Devon: Paternoster, 1989) 141-149, or more recently Warren Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Evangelist, Interpreter* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996), 149-175.

[59] In v14 only some manuscripts have "my," and the preferred reading is "your," but this is a minor point.

[60] William G. Thompson, *Matthew's Advice to a Divided Community: Mt 17,22-18,35* AnBib 44 (Rome:

PREDICTION: passion, death and resurrection (17:22-3)

INSTRUCTIONS:

a Peter: Payment of the Half Shekel Tax (17:24-27)

b Disciples: *General norm*: True Greatness in the Kingdom of Heaven (18:1-4)

Specific Situations: *a* The Evil of Scandal (18:5-9)

b The Care of Sheep Going Away (18:10-14)

a' Reconciling a Brother (18:15-20)

a' Peter: Forgiveness in the Kingdom of Heaven (18:21-35).

Debates about literary units, boundaries and structures are frequently open to several responsible[61] outcomes, and I do not seek a definitive structure. My purpose here is simply to show that 18:15-20 should not be shorn from its immediate literary context. I shall focus my attention in what follows mainly on 18:10-22.

In terms of an even wider literary context, I have been persuaded by Willard Swartley of "the formative influence of the Old Testament way-conquest (and Exodus) traditions on the synoptic journey narrative."[62] He writes that Matthew's explicit use of this part of the scriptural story in his central section (16:13-20:34)[63] appears in his transfiguration account (17:1-8), which accentuates the Moses and Mount Sinai imagery. It differs from Mark and Luke in that it

> lacks explicit reference to the way-conquest motifs of the older story. Its conceptual emphases, however, are strikingly analogous to the conquest. Indeed Matthew crafts a narrative that zeroes in on *that which he and his community deem essential for both foundational and continuing victory in the life of the church*. This he does with astounding power and scope.[64]

Biblical Institute, 1970), 244.

[61] I refer to the important work of Roger Lundin, Anthony C. Thiselton & Clarence Walhout, *The Responsibility of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, Mi./Exeter, Devon: Eerdmans/Paternoster, 1985).

[62] This is the title of chapter 4 of Willard Swartley's *Israel's Scripture Traditions.*

[63] Swartley, 116, though many would take 16:21 as the start of the new section, signalled by ἀπὸ τότε, "from that time," thus "placing Jesus on the Road to Jerusalem and the cross," according to Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28* WBC 33B (Dallas, Texas: Word, 1995), 477. I note that Matthew does not start the geographical journey to Jerusalem until 19:1, but it can be argued that Peter's confession at Caesaria Philippi (16:13-20) forms a transition from the early Galilean ministry and is strongly linked to the churchly concerns of 17:22-20:33 by 16:18.

[64] Swartley, 117.

I shall now proceed to identify three echoes of Scripture[65] in Matt 18:10-22, beginning with the fundamental motif of Israel's way-conquest story, the link between forgiveness and divine presence. Secondly, I will show that there is a reworking of the conquest tradition in the book of Ezekiel which links Matthew's sheep parable to his teaching on conflict resolution. My third echo is of Israel's stories of world origins in the Book of Genesis.

E2. Exodus 34, Numbers 14, Joshua 7

Many scholars have noticed the Moses typology in the Gospel of Matthew,[66] and this forms a particularly strong nexus with the theme of divine presence encountered at Mount Sinai.[67]

In the traumatic wake of Israel's sin with the golden calf, Moses pleaded successfully for YHWH to spare the people (Exod 32:1-35). Yet when Moses was commanded to lead Israel to the promised land, YHWH specifically withheld his presence from among them (33:3). But Moses, realising that the presence of YHWH was essential to the distinctiveness of Israel (33:16), continued to intercede by asking to see God's glory, to which YHWH responded, "You cannot see my face" (33:20). Yet Moses was permitted to see his back and, in the wake of YHWH's renewed self-revelation, pleaded once more, "let YHWH go with us" (34:9) until there was an unmistakeable commitment of creative[68] presence among the people (34:10). Thus the presence of God

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[65] I have used the term made influential by Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1989). Hays responded to criticisms of this work in "On the Rebound: A Response to Critiques of *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*" in *Paul and the Scriptures of Israel*, edd. Craig A. Evans & James A. Sanders, JSNTSS 83 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 70-96. For a recent summary of the field see Kenneth D. Litwak, "Echoes of Scripture? A Critical Survey of Recent Works on Paul's Use of the Old Testament," *CRBS* 6 (1998), 260-288.

[66] For a recent, full treatment see Dale C. Allison, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993).

[67] Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel*, 116-130, emphasises Moses' three encounters in Exod 3-4, 19-24 & 32-34.

[68] "I will perform marvels, such as have not been performed (*bārā'* = "created") in all the earth." Terence Fretheim comments, "What God is doing for Israel is an act parallel to the creation of the world!... This suggests that verse 10 does *not*, strictly speaking, refer to a renewal of the covenant of chapters 19-24... *This is an entirely new reality for Israel, indeed for the world.*" *Exodus* INT (Louisville, Ken.: John Knox, 1991), 308.

and the forgiveness of God were inextricable: no forgiveness, no presence; once forgiveness was given, presence could be assured.

The resolution of the crisis concerning divine presence, precipitated by Israel's rebellion, in an act of divine forgiveness was paradigmatic for the rest of her story. Not long after Israel's departure from Sinai, the time came to possess the land so long promised. Yet, dismayed by the fearful spy report and refusing Caleb's minority optimism, the people refused to go up to occupy the land (Num 13:25-14:10). YHWH's response to this rebellion was to contemplate destroying them, yet Moses pleaded successfully for YHWH to spare the people, appealing to YHWH's presence "in the midst of this people," and to the same self-revelation of YHWH as he had received before (Num 14:14-19). When Moses informed the people that they would die in the wilderness they attempted to mount an invasion, despite Moses warning, "Do not go up, for YHWH is not with you," and they were defeated (Num 14:39-45). Thus, once more, the presence of God and the forgiveness of God were inextricable: but here a belated attempt at obedience which paid no heed to YHWH's word of judgement through Moses, meant defeat in battle because of YHWH's absence.

The same issue arose as the story of Israel's occupation of the land proceeded. After the defeat of Jericho, "the Israelites broke faith in regard to the devoted things," (Josh 7:1) and were defeated by the men of Ai. YHWH informed Joshua that "I will be with you no more, unless you destroy the devoted things from among you." (Josh 7:12)[69] Walter Brueggemann has traced Israel's characteristic speech about God in times of crisis to the prophets (Hos 2:2-23 & Isa 54:7-10), and into the writings (Lam 3:22-24 & Psa 85:8-13).[70]

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[69] The same theme can be discerned in the subsequent books, though the process of apostasy-punishment-forgiveness becomes more drawn out. The book of Judges attributed military defeats to Israel's apostasy (Jdg 2:11-15), although YHWH sent several deliverer-judges in his mercy on the people. When the ark was captured by the Philistines Eli's daughter-in-law named her son Ichabod, meaning "The glory has departed from Israel" (1 Sam 4:21), yet YHWH initiated a return of the ark, and a recovery from Philistine oppression through Samuel (1 Sam 5-7).

[70] Walter Brueggemann, "Crisis Evoked, Crisis Resolving Speech" *BTB* 24 (1994), 95-105.

This connection between the forgiveness and the presence of God drives the teaching about mutual care, forgiveness and reconciliation in Matt 18:10-35.[71] In the wake of Israel's disobedience, YHWH's face had been inaccessible to Moses,[72] yet Jesus advised care for "these little ones" since "in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven" (18:10). On Sinai and in the wilderness, YHWH forgave the people (in a general sense, though not without punishing some of them) in response to the persistent request of Moses. In the land, Israel's occupation continued only after the execution of judgement upon Achan and his family, and during the time of the judges apostasy led to YHWH's opposition (Jdg 2:15). In Matthew, precisely because in Jesus "God is with us" (1:21), heavenly forgiveness is coordinate with the ecclesial practice of conflict resolution (18:18-19).[73] There is a warning of judgement in the stumbling-block sayings (18:6-9), and a note of discipline is retained in the conflict-resolution process, for if the offender will not be reconciled, he cannot continue in the presence of Jesus which the church enjoys (18:17). Yet the church must proceed with this reconciling process with a repeated preparedness to forgive, as Jesus insists in vv 21-35.[74]

E3. Ezekiel 34

Commentators sometimes point to Ezek 34 as background to Matthew's parable of the lost sheep (18:12-13). Donald Hagner, for instance, speculates that ἐπὶ τὰ ὄρη is an allusion to Ezek 34:6.[75] This proposal can be given greater precision.[76] Ezek 34:2b-10

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[71] For a different tracing of the same themes into the New Testament, see Walter Brueggemann, "The Crisis and Promise of Presence in Israel," *HBT* 1 (1979), 47-86; reprinted in Brueggemann's *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme and Text* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 150-182.

[72] Note that Moses pleads, "for you, O YHWH, are seen face to face" in Num 14:14.

[73] For a survey of other interpretations of "binding and loosing" and an argument for its reference to exorcism, see Richard H. Hiers, ""Binding and Loosing": The Matthean Authorizations," *JBL* 104/2 (1985), 233-250.

[74] We might also note that Matthew's gospel closes at the commissioning of the disciples with Jesus' promise "I am with you always" (28:20), at which point readers hear the echo of 18:20. Thus the assurance of Jesus' presence links the church's mission to its practice of reconciliation.

[75] Matt 18:12 is "probably a deliberate change of Q (cf. Lk 15:6)," according to Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 527.

[76] On several verbal contacts with the LXX of Ezek 34, see W. D. Davis & D. C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, ICC vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 769.

is a speech of indictment and judgement of Israel's leaders for their exploitative neglect of the people/flock which led to its scattering. This would form a strange background against which to understand Matthew's parable for, though some details are coincident, the attitudes and results are in reverse. However, the next part of the prophetic oracle is more promising. In Ezek 34:11-15 YHWH declares that he himself is coming to regather the flock so that it may enjoy pasture "on the mountains" (13, 14) and "mountain heights" (14). Moshe Greenberg observes that "The closing formula of v15 ("declares Lord YHWH") separates God's dealings with the entire flock from his treatment of the needy individuals within it"[77] which occurs in v16:

> I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.

Thus the eschatological coming of God to regather his people in their land is *supplemented* with search and rescue operations aimed at stray individuals. Ezek 34:17-31 continues to develop the theme of dealing with injustice amongst the reconstituted flock, introduces a covenant of peace which recovers the original creation (34:25-9), and concludes with a double recognition formula unique in Ezekiel (34:30):

> They shall know that I, YHWH their God, am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, says the Lord God.

The implementation of justice and peace will demonstrate God's presence among them.[78]

Ezekiel's eschatological oracle revisited the issues of apostasy Israel had originally encountered when it had first entered the land, but this time in terms of community behaviour - justice and peace. He insisted that YHWH would regather the people from exile but also take personal action to deal with casualties that occurred *subsequent* to the return. It seems that in Matthew's telling of this parable, he envisaged that the eschatological gathering of God's people had already been achieved by Jesus[79], but that

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[77] Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37* AB 22A (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1997), 705.
[78] This formula assuring of God's presence is frequent enough to be significant in the Old Testament, see H. D. Preuss, "...ich will mit dir seen!" *ZAW* 80, 1968, 139-173.
[79] As N. T. Wright proposes in *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 533n203 and 645n120.

supplementary problems would occur among the flock, τὰ πλανώμενον ("the straying one") in Matt 18:12 forming a clear echo of Ezek 34:16.[80] Thus the parable is not about the work of Jesus (the one who carries out his Father's will on earth) in regathering the people of God into the church, but about his supplementary work[81] in seeking those who stray from it. The question then arises, how will Jesus search for strays? The answer is supplied in the reconciling process described in 18:15-17. The three-step human process, carried out by the church with the intention of returning "strays" to the "flock" is itself God's work in Jesus, and that is why the assurance is given that such action on earth corresponds with that in heaven in 18:18-19. It is also why the assurance of Jesus' presence is given in 18:20, a clear echo of Ezek 34:30.

E4. Genesis 4

Jesus' extension of the requirement to forgive "my brother" to "as many as seventy-seven times" (Matt 18:21-22), is a deliberate reversal of violent Lamech's boast in Gen 4:24.[82] This boast was a distortion of YHWH's warning against the killing of Cain (Gen 4:15), following his murder of Abel.[83] In Israel's account of world origins, violence was not intrinsic to creation,[84] but entered humanity after the Fall with this fraternal conflict.

In the canonical book of Genesis the eruption and resolution of fraternal conflict is a major theme which is of significance for the broader subject of violence. It comes to a head in 6:11-13, precipitating the flood. There is friction within Abraham's household over the half-brothers, Ishmael and Isaac (21:8-14), and enmity between Esau and Jacob after the latter's deception (27:41) which is only partially resolved following Jacob's encounter with God at Peniel (33:1-17). Joseph's brothers deceive their father, having

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[80] Hagner, *Matthew 14-18*, 527, does not differentiate between the contexts of Ezek 34:4 and 16.
[81] This term, derived from our study of Ezek 34:16, strikes me as the most appropriate way to characterise what Swartley has imprecisely described as "some sort of sequential relationship" between the second passion-resurrection prediction of 17:22f and 18:1-4 in *Israel's Scripture Traditions*, 124.
[82] On the coincidence with the LXX wording of Gen 4:22, see Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 537; Davies & Allison, *Saint Matthew*, vol.2, 793.
[83] Yoder commented on Gen 4 in "On Generating Alternative Paradigms," *Human Values and the Environment: Conference Proceedings*, Report 140 (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, 1992), 56-62. See also *For the Nations*, 48.
[84] As in many of the ancient myths such as the *Enuma Elish*. On the relation between the *Enuma Elish* and Gen 1 see Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* WBC 1 (Waco, Texas: Word, 1987), 7-10.

sold him into slavery (37:28-35), and he later deceives them before revealing his new identity to them along with his insight into God's hidden purposes (45:1-8). But this is only a partial resolution since the brothers still fear Joseph after their father's death, and he must reassure them with a profound recognition of the proper limits of his power: "Am I in the place of God?" (50:19). This forms an appropriate (though long delayed) human response to the serpent's original temptation ("you will be like God") with which creation had begun to unravel (3:5).[85] The book closes with the double eschatological pronouncement, "God will surely come to you," (50:24, 25)

Genesis thus gives us to understand that the resolution of the fraternal conflict which distorts the good creation is a process that must be learned among God's own people who recognise God's plan (*ḥāšab*)[86] in their lives and look forward to God's coming. Jesus' insistence on forgiveness within God's family (Matt 18:22) meant that he envisaged his disciples practicing a return to the "ethos of creation."[87] This may be compared with his teaching on divorce in the next chapter, "from the beginning it was not so" (Matt 19:8).

E5. Conclusion

If I have heard correctly the echoes of Exod 33-4, Num 14 and Josh 7, of Ezek 34 and Gen 4 in Matt 18:10-35, then our passage has a threefold theological matrix of God's own presence and character as forgiving though just (as revealed in the crises of the way-conquest traditions); of God's eschatological supplementation of his salvation through the agency of the church (as promised in Ezekiel); and of the ethos of new creation as non-

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[85] I have not found a commentator who makes this connection, though Walter Brueggemann sees the link between "God intended it for good" (50:20) and God's verdict on creation in 1:31, in his *Genesis* INT (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox, 1982), 376-7. Cf., Terence Fretheim, "Genesis" *NIB* Vol. 1 (Nashville, Tn.: Abingdon, 1994), 672. For profound reflections on this passage see J. Gerald Janzen *Abraham and All the Families of the Earth: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis 12-50* ITC (Grand Rapids, Mi./Edinburgh: Eerdmans/Handsel, 1993), 199-207.

[86] See Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 373-76.

[87] I derive this expression from William P. Brown, who discusses both Cain and Lamech under the heading "The Ontology of Violence" in *The Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1999), 164-174. Incidentally, Brown comments on the priestly theology of identity and integration, "Israel is called to a life of holiness that places it in a distinctive *and* positive relationship to the earth's integrity in all its plurality, for community and cosmos belong to the same creator." (131).

violent (revisiting Israel's stories of origin in Genesis). I submit that this exploration undergirds Yoder's repeated reliance upon Matt 18:15-20 in his ecclesiological thinking.

4.3 Preliminary Evaluation

I have now completed the exposition of Yoder's characterization of the church. It is appropriate at this stage to make some evaluation of his position. I shall do this first through a consideration of the effectiveness of his sociological method, making comparisons with the work of several New Testament scholars. Then I propose a means of evaluating his characterization of the church in terms of its visibility. It is sometimes suggested that Yoder's ecclesiology presents an unrealizable ideal, so I deal, thirdly, with its viability. A fuller evaluation of his ecclesiology must take into account the following chapters and a summary will be found in chapter 8.

4.3.1 The Effectiveness of Yoder's Sociological Method

Once the character of the church was established in terms of specific allegiance to Christ then Yoder's methodological choices followed. Whilst open to understanding the community of the church sociologically, he was surely correct to insist on a specific sociology for the church since it is a human community animated by God's Spirit. He did not define the boundary of this community in institutional terms, but rather in confessional terms, though its crossing was enacted in the practice of baptism. It was his historically informed socio-theological approach to characterization which enabled him to consider the church at the level of a human social community while maintaining its theological dimensions.

Yoder's views may be compared with those of a number of theorists in this field. Interest in the communal dimension of the early Christians was particularly sparked in the 1980s by Wayne Meeks' work on *The First Urban Christians.*[88] Stanley Stowers

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[88] Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1983). This had been preceded by Robert Banks' less well known though more theologically perceptive work, to which I shall refer in chapter 6, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in their Historical Setting* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1980).

subjected this to damaging criticism for its reductionist employment of functionalism, amongst other faults.[89] John Milbank argues in his major work, *Theology and Social Theory*, that theology must reassert its claim to be a metadiscourse in respect to social theory since, among other things, "secular social theory only applies to secular society," indeed, "sociology is only able to explain or even illuminate religion, to the extent that it conceals its own theological borrowings and its own quasi-religious status." He shows how Meeks' work informs the reader merely about the "relatively unsurprising" features of the early church, "whereas its surprising, unique features are precisely the reason why it made a historical difference, why we are still interested in it at all."[90]

In contrast let us consider the work of Philip Esler on Galatians 5:13-6:10. He argues that this passage deals, not so much with "ethics," as with Christian identity forged in the context of intergroup conflict.

> We are not dealing here, as John Barclay argues, with "ethical maxims" attached to the issue of identity, but with identity itself, in the establishment of which norms form only a part. By building on the unique experience of the Spirit, which brought the Galatian communities into being, as a means of sharply differentiating the life of the congregations from that of the Jewish and Gentile worlds... Paul seeks to forge an identity distinct from both Jew and Gentile.[91]

Not only is Esler more discriminating in his use of the social sciences than a number of recent New Testament scholars, but he is also prepared to take seriously the unique identity of the Christian community which is derived from the gift of the Spirit, a distinct lacuna in Meeks' work. He rightly sees ethical norms as an element of group identity. In a similar way, Yoder's work integrates a profound ethic with the specific identity of the

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[89] Stanley K. Stowers, "The Social Sciences and the Study of Early Christianity," in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism, Vol. V: Studies in Judaism and its Greco-Roman Context*, ed. William Scott Green (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars, 1985), 149-181. It seems that in his subsequent work Meeks has sought to meet Stowers' call for "an adequate account... of the Pauline churches as purposive social and moral communities." (176) See Wayne Meeks, *The Moral World of the First Christians* (London: SPCK, 1987) and *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1993). Yoder reviewed the latter in "A Response to Wayne Meeks' *Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries*," (unpublished presentation in a colloquium on the use of the New Testament in Ethics at Duke Divinity School, Durham N.C., April 1995).

[90] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (see n53 above), quotations from p3, 52, 117.

[91] Philip Esler, "Group Boundaries and Intergroup conflict in Galatians: a new Reading of Galatians 5:13-6:10," in *Ethnicity and the Bible*, ed. Mark G Brett (London, New York, Köln: E.J. Brill, 1996), 215-240, here 238.

community of specific allegiance to its Lord. It seems to me that this kind of sociological work on the New Testament which allows room for the theological particularity of the early church is making a contribution to our understanding of ecclesiology. In many ways Yoder's work anticipated some of these insights.

Whilst Yoder gave considerable attention to church practices, there are other dimensions of church life, amenable to socio-theological exploration, to which he did not attend. Stanley Hauerwas has been a leading advocate of the recovery of the virtues in Christian ethics, but he reflects: "As our colleague and teacher John Yoder has often reminded us, the New Testament seems to speak more about what we can and cannot do than it does about the virtues we ought to have."[92] There are arrangements which the church has adopted (and could extend) to promote the development of the virtues, such as discipleship, mentoring, and apprenticeship schemes.[93] Even without engaging in virtue talk, Yoder might have discussed such arrangements as another significant set of community building practices. In an era in which the introduction of youth congregations and alternative churches bear witness to a fragmentation in church life which sociologists observe in wider society, such arrangements can function across established divides of age and background to foster understanding and community. I would suggest that such social arrangements might be developed in terms of a vital triad of ethics, spirituality and community.[94]

4.3.2 The Visibility of the Church

How might Yoder's definition of the church as the community of specific allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord be evaluated? I propose that one means of evaluation take the form of a consideration of the distinction between the visible and invisible church. If the

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[92] Stanley Hauerwas & Charles Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 113.
[93] Robert Banks has reflected on the biblical background of these, and of coworking and partnering in the course of advocating theological education for many more than church leaders in *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1999), part 2, and see 135-6, 216, 230.
[94] On the link between ethics and spirituality, see William C. Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 1999). On the link between ethics and community, see Stephen E. Fowl & L. Gregory Jones, *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life* (London: SPCK, 1991).

church is to be characterized in terms of the specific allegiance of its members rather than the proper performance of sacramental and homiletic activity, there is still the question of whether confession is petitionary: how can the genuineness of the confession be defined?

Augustine insisted on the principle that the true church consisted of those who were devout Christians, known only to God, and was therefore invisible to humans, but he added that this invisible fellowship was only to be found within the visible, i.e., the historical Catholic church.[95] In the medieval church the doctrine of the church as a visible institution became dominant, and the Magisterial Reformers responded by reasserting the significance of the invisible though without neglect of the visible. In the twentieth century Karl Barth condemned "an ecclesiastical docetism" in Protestantism which tended to "magnify an invisible fellowship of the Spirit and the spirits" at the expense of the visible church.[96] Yoder had his own criticism, insisting that:

> From Abraham to the Apocalypse, the city God builds is on earth. The narrowing to the Augustinian agenda may be of some use, transitionally and pastorally, for some corrective purposes. It may be needed to warn against self-righteousness, and to enable us to converse in our neighbour's idiom of humanistic individualism. It may refine in a salutary way our expectations of direct relevance. Yet it becomes a betrayal when it denies that the newness of the Gospel can take on flesh.[97]

The distinction between the visible and invisible church has been explored recently by the evangelical Anglican, Kevin Giles, and his work provides a convenient foil for Yoder's since his conclusion is that the visible and invisible cannot finally be correlated.[98] There are two aspects of Giles' treatment of the subject which undermine his particular case.[99] First, he gives insufficient attention to careful treatment of the biblical texts on this issue. Second, he takes insufficient account of the fact that

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[95] See Mary T. Clark, *Augustine* OCTS (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), 73-6.
[96] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.1, ET ed. G. W. Bromiley & T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 653.
[97] Yoder, "How to Be Read by the Bible," (Shalom Desktop: 1995), 51.
[98] Kevin Giles, *What on Earth is the Church?* (London: SPCK, 1995), 194f.
[99] Additionally, Giles himself acknowledges that the origins of the distinction between the visible and invisible are Platonic. (190). This is somewhat ironic since elsewhere he criticises others for a congregationalism which he thinks has almost a platonic origin (119).

Augustine developed his ecclesiology after the establishment of Christianity as the official religion of the empire.

Firstly, since Bornkamm's work on Matthew's ecclesiology, the term *corpus mixtum* has been used of it.[100] It is true that several passages indicate that a final reckoning between those who belong to the church and their Lord will reveal that the profession of some members is false (especially 7:21-23). But this does not relieve the church of its responsibility to admonish, exercise discipline and even withdraw fellowship from those who will not accept its sensitive application (as in 18:15-20). It is often supposed that the parable of the wheat and the tares (13:24-30) counts against such "judgementalism" (Giles throws this into his conclusion on 194). It is worth quoting the commentary of Baptist, Donald Carson on the view that "The field is the world" (13:38) means "the field is the church":

> The view was largely assumed by the church fathers, and the tendency to interpret the parable that way was reinforced by the Constantinian settlement. Augustine made the interpretation official: struggling against the Donatists, who were overzealous in their excommunication practices, he went so far as to say that a mixture of good and evil in the church is a necessary "sign" of the church (cf. esp. his *Breviculus Collationis cum Donatistis* and his *Ad Donatistas post Collationem*). Most Reformers followed the same line: Calvin went so far as to say that the "world" here represents the church by synecdoche.
>
> Ironically some modern redaction criticism has returned to this interpretation because it sees more of Matthew's church than of Jesus in this Gospel. Nevertheless this interpretation is without exegetical foundation. The kingdom is a category flexible enough to be used simultaneously for the saving reign of God (so that "sons of the kingdom" can refer to those who are truly God's people, v38) and for his reign more broadly considered (so that the kingdom in this sense might well embrace wheat and tares; see on 3:2; 5:3; 28:18); but it is not demonstrable that "church" ever has such semantic flexibility, or that "church" is ever confused with "kingdom".[101]

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[100] Gunter Bornkamm, "End-Expectation and Church in Matthew," in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, ed. G. Bornkamm et al (London: SCM, 1963), 15-51, here 19. Giles makes much of this on p60-61.

[101] D. A. Carson "Matthew" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Zondervan, 1984), 325f. A number of other recent commentators also recognise that the "field" here cannot be identified as the church: e.g., R. T. France, *Matthew*, TNTC (Leicester: IVP, 1985), 224. Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, WBC 33A (Dallas, Texas: Word, 1993), 393.

The fact that Matthew has Jesus warning that he might declare of some "I never knew you" (7:23) or told the parable of a man ejected from the wedding feast because he was inappropriately dressed (22:1-14) does not relieve the *ecclesia* of the responsibility of binding and loosing (18:15-20). Precisely because the church lives in the eschatological overlap, this practice has a disciplining effect intended to lessen the number of false disciples who will face rejection at the last judgement - perhaps by forewarning those concerned of the emptiness of their confession, or by alerting the church as a whole to the seriousness of the issues concerned. Thus the use of the term *corpus mixtum* cannot carry the weight which Giles places upon it: while it may warn against complacency on the part of community members, it does not relieve them of mutual ethical responsibility. It cannot be used to erode the demand for the ecclesial distinctiveness which goes with specific allegiance. In other words, the term *corpus mixtum* requires further specification in order to be a useful ecclesial concept and to avoid its ideological use.

Secondly, Giles explains that Augustine addressed a historical situation in which the Donatists would not accept the Catholic faith, but in which also the membership of the Catholic church included "the covetous, the defrauders, the robbers, the usurers and the drunkards."[102] His solution was to appeal to the doctrine of predestination and to perpetuate an ecclesial reading of the parable of the tares. But this was an abdication of episcopal responsibility for the holiness of the church, forced upon Augustine by the shift in ecclesiology that had taken place with the establishment of Christianity as official religion of the empire.[103] Was it possible for a theologian of the church which had embraced the life of the empire to have returned the church to a communal understanding of binding and loosing which could address such basic ethical shortcomings?[104]

Of course, the practice of penance was developing such that less serious sins were dealt with by means of private confession, while public church discipline and excommunication came to be restricted to the most serious of mortal sins or public

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[102] Giles, *What on Earth is the Church?*, 190.
[103] See further, §6.2
[104] Robert Markus has characterized Augustine's *City of God* as "a defence of Christian mediocrity" in *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 51-62.

transgressions, such as murder, heresy or witchcraft.[105] So a pervasive form of discipline was in the process of being put in place, though it was clearly limited in effectiveness. If another route was unimaginable for Augustine and the Medieval church, then one must marvel that it became not only theologically imaginable but practically realisable among the sixteenth century Anabaptists, for even their adversaries testified to the striking quality of life which they typically exhibited.[106] Theirs was a hermeneutical recovery of New Testament ethics, and it was made possible by a rediscovery of the character of the church as a community of specific allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The argument that there will always be an uneasy tension between the theological definition of the church and its visible reality, as presented by Giles, is exegetically flawed and ecclesiologically vulnerable. Yoder's insistence on a greater concern for the genuineness of the visible church has yet to be effectively refuted. Yet his own recognition that believer's baptism "is not itself a sure cure,"[107] constituted a significant warning that no one practice could ensure that genuineness; the church was originally embodied in a broad spectrum of practices, empowered by God's Spirit. The neglect of these, or even their atrophy by reduction to liturgical symbol, would undermine the church as a visible community.

4.3.3 The Viability of the Church

Yoder wrote a short paper specifically to deal with the objection that the ecclesiology which he maintained was utopian; had he ever experienced church in the terms indicated by his ecclesiology?[108] Here he recognized the importance and force of the question of viability as well as its limitations (1-2). He explained that he had never been called to be

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[105] L. Michael White, s.v. "Discipline, Ecclesiastical" in *EEC*, 336-8. From the sixth century onward excommunication (exclusion from worship and sacraments) was distinguished from anathematization (complete ban from the church), which could amount to banishment and exile.

[106] In *The Royal Priesthood*, p79, Yoder refers to Harold Bender's collection of contemporary descriptions into an article, "'Walking in the Resurrection': The Anabaptist Doctrine of Regeneration and Discipleship," *MQR* XXXV (April 1961): 96-110.

[107] Yoder, "Adjusting to the changing shape of the debate on infant baptism," 211f.

[108] Yoder, "Have you ever seen a true Church?" (Unpublished, 1988, 5 pages). Unattributed page numbers in this subsection refer to this paper.

a "pastor" and thus had not had the opportunity to work with a particular congregation, though it must be borne in mind that he did not believe that a church should commit itself to one person's leading. However,

> I have been called into experiences of the formation of new community groups which are on the average more loving, more successful at living up to the "idea and utopia which I carry in my head" than have been many others. The fact that I am not locally a member of all of those communities does not keep them from being confirmation of the vision in my experience. Reba Place, Fellowship of Hope, and Sojourners are all experiences of community in whose origins I shared indirectly, and in which my person and views have encountered at one time or another the grace of acceptance beyond desert. (3)

He believed that "the procession of church renewal phenomena is real and true and gracious," despite the decline in devotion in generations subsequent to the originating one. (4) The fact of decline might indicate the inadequacy of the original vision, but

> to measure the second generation and... third by the idealism of the first generation is not a fair test either of the community or of the ideal, precisely because the situation of later generations poses new questions which are not automatically either answered or set aside by appealing to the truth of the earlier right answers. (4)

Having provided some positive response to the question of viability, Yoder turned the same question onto other Christian traditions, asking how satisfactorily other ecclesiologies could provide verification through the fulfilment of what they promised:

> Does possessing a Catholic vision of the church automatically produce universality? Does a "main-stream Protestant" view of the church genuinely integrate itself with the course of events? Does a Reformed Church genuinely succeed in creating a theocratic social order? (5)

Universal human frailty kept every vision of the church from finding confirmation through its success and good works, and every church stood in tension between what it hopes in its message and what it experiences in the ordinary run of lesser degrees of faithfulness and joy. But there was a difference between the radical discipleship vision of the church and some other standard theological alternatives in that when there was disobedience or lukewarmness, it provided a two-fold instrument of correction: analysis ("apostasy")[109] and correction ("binding and loosing"). Other more "inclusive" or

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[109] As noted in §4.2.2, and will be treated in detail in §6.2.

mainstream" traditions made less demanding claims on people and might thus claim more success, but the radical community claimed only that its members were committed to the right way of working at their unfaithfulness. (5)

My own observation on the issue of viability would be to acknowledge that there are real difficulties in implementing an ecclesiology like Yoder's within a culture which has had a long history of Christendom, such as England. So many ingrained assumptions about church life, even among people with experience of the free churches, make it difficult to grasp and convey the nuances of the Anabaptist vision, especially within an individualistic and consumerist society. Yet the growth of the Anabaptist Network in Britain during the 1990s bears witness to a growing conviction that such a vision of the church is of practical significance in an increasingly post-Christian culture.[110]

4.3.4 Orientation

I have now presented the main features of Yoder's definition of the church. Some theological observations and preliminary evaluations have been made. Two linked issues have been identified for further consideration before examining his views on leadership and authority in chapter 7. Firstly, Yoder's frequent appeals to Judaism for insight into the life of the Christian community require further exploration, and will occupy chapter 5. Secondly, the concept of a fallen church is such an important feature that chapter 6 must be given to exploring its implications. It emerges that both of these subjects enable us to explore the complex subject of tradition which, as we saw in chapter 1, stands in essential relation to community.

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[110] The inaugural edition of *Anabaptism Today: Christian Discipleship in the Radical Tradition* (November 1992) explains the formation of the Anabaptist Network, made up of Christians scattered around the country and belonging to a variety of churches, focused in a network of study groups.

5. The Tradition of the Community (1): Its Jewish Heritage

As we saw in chapters 1 and 2, the identity of a community is tied up with its tradition, and so I now turn to a two-part consideration of the tradition of the church. In the next chapter I will treat Yoder's understanding of the tradition and career of the church through its own history. Yet I shall argue that the tradition of God's people begins in its Jewish heritage, and that the story of Israel provides a measure even of early Christian tradition. In chapter 4 we observed Yoder's argument that ecclesiology required the acknowledgement of a fall of the church before the formation of Christendom, since the age of Constantine merely saw the fruition of something that had begun long before. He identified the nub of the problem as deriving from a shift in the understanding of the relationship between church and world which manifested itself in creeping empire loyalism and accommodation to neoplatonism, but the focus of this shift he held to be the adoption of anti-Judaism.[1] In this chapter I will discuss in detail Yoder's understanding of the Jewish heritage of the church, for it is in this tradition that Christianity stands, and from it any subsequent notion of tradition must derive.

Yoder's awareness of the significance of this subject is evidenced in his production in 1996 of a collection of essays on the subject, some of which had originated as early as 1971. The usual process of revision and recasting had been going on, but he felt unable to turn his thesis into a proper book, aware of the size and complexity of the subject. Yet, despite the recent flood of writing on the Jewish-Christian schism, he felt that he did have a distinctive perspective. So, at the urging of friends, and aware of his age, he took advantage of desktop technology to make these writings available as "The Jewish Christian Schism Revisited."[2] One of these essays, "See How They Go With Their Face to the Sun," was published in *For the Nations* in 1997.

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[1] e.g., Yoder *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 208n25; see also his "Tertium Datur" essay of 1977 (unpublished).

[2] Yoder, "The Jewish Christian Schism Revisited: A Bundle of Old Essays" (Shalom Desktop Publication, 1996), 11. Unattributed page numbers in the following section refer to this collection.

I will begin by setting out and evaluating Yoder's view of the Jewish-Christian schism. In section two I move on to his particular reading of the story of Israel. In section three I will explore the significance of the Jewish model of community for the Christian community.

5.1 The Jewish-Christian Schism

As a historian, Yoder was alert to common assumptions about the construal of historical developments. I begin with his methodological doubt about the inevitability of the development of mainstream Christianity in the first few centuries. Secondly, I will show how this enabled him to raise important questions about the Jewish-Christian schism, questions which others have begun to raise in recent years. Thirdly I will compare Yoder's view with others in the debate about supersessionism. This will allow conclusions about his work in this area to be formulated.

5.1.1 It Did Not Have To Be

The first point to be made concerns historical method. The natural path of historical investigation of events seeks understanding of them by examination of their causes. Sensible as this procedure may seem, Yoder thought that it failed to do justice to the lived experience of the people of the period under investigation who had known more than later historians could about their own situation and the choices they had faced, and who had had no knowledge of the outcome of those choices beforehand. "We therefore do violence to the lived reality of history as it really was if, in our concern to make sense of it all after the fact, we let our explanatory schemes rob its actors of the integrity of their indecision as well of their decision-making." (19) This was all the more so in the case of the Jewish-Christian schism, in which there was no single event or decision involved; it was a gradual process over many years. So historians must refuse to to let "the way things are" have the last word. Such a perspective

> pushes us to ask far more ambitious and complex questions about all of the forces which were at work, and about how things could have been otherwise, in

order to discern options which might have been really available if someone had had the information, or the courage, or the organisation to reach them, distinguishing these from other kinds of wishful thinking, and from wasteful or resentful utopias. It drives us to take stock carefully of the powers and resources which were there but were not tapped, or which were at work but did not win out. It drives us to reconstruct carefully the processes of decision operative within the minds of major actors, within the deliberations of groups, within the interactions of structural pressures, so as to liberate those events from the deprecation which is involved in saying that they were fated, and thus to restore them to their authentic worth as real, flawed, yet sometimes noble human searches and decisions. (20)

Theological and philosophical considerations strengthened Yoder's case. He identified as "possibilist" a position which affirmed the possibility of obedience to God within history over against an "Augustinian" framework in which complete obedience was intrinsically impossible. (90) Those who held the "possibilist" position affirmed that human behaviour might please God - in principle, if not in fact.[3] The "Augustinians" so emphasised the fallen state of all creation that finitude and sin tended to coincide, human rebellion became a matter of ontology, and history ruled out faithfulness. Despite this insistence on human sinfulness, Augustine had held that the true church was indefectible in that the *notae ecclesiae* could never be lost. In contrast, the Radical Reformers had believed that any church, including their own, was radically defectible; that the obverse of possible obedience was possible apostasy. Whilst the church had a sure future at the hands of a God who gives life to the dead, no particular expression of the church could assume security without accountability.

Yoder acknowledged that his non-Augustinian position might seem "Jewish" in the apparent pride of thinking it possible to do the will of God, but countered that this understanding of human depravity was more pessimistic than Augustine's. Sin was something which should not have been; to imagine that things could have been different was both more repentant and more hopeful than to allow inevitability to the actual course of events. He found a "very narrow path" between Judaism and Augustinianism by

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[3] Yoder gave a New Testament textual basis for this position in the Greek word group ἀρεσκέω (to please), εὐδοκέω (to approve). (90) A summary of this topic is provided by H. Bietenhard, s.v., "Please" *NIDNTT* 2, 814-20. For further details see the articles in *TDNT* vol.I, 455-7, and vol. II, 738-42.

locating the capacity for the possibility not in humanity (as in Pelagius) but in God's power, God's capacity to bring about the unexpected through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. "Because the Messiah came and poured out God's Spirit, obedience is possible." (91) Thus Yoder's view of history was pneumatologically informed.

In order to defend himself against the accusation of inventing an arbitrary scheme of his own. Yoder illustrated this narrow path in some detail from the Schleitheim Confession of Swiss and South German Anabaptists of February 1527, emphasizing both what he called its "nomic element" which motivated and informed a costly countercultural lifestyle based on appeal to Jesus, and the sense of the unifying work of God's Spirit among those who produced this confession. (92-99)

5.1.2 Critique of the Standard View of the Jewish-Christian Schism

Yoder applied these considerations to the story of the Jewish-Christian schism. Historians have tended to look back at the original events or process from a vantage point in which normative Christianity and normative Judaism were distinct and incompatible stances. If the eventual divide between Judaism and Christianity cannot be identified with God's will, "then we do not do total justice to God's intent in the story by reading it as if the outcome he did not want, but which did happen, had to happen." (23)

Where once it was thought that Christianity had grown out of and departed from a normative Judaism, it has become clear[4] that there was no such thing as normative Judaism in the first century of our era. Within Jewish society of the Second Temple period there were several competing authorities together with their particular structures: the rabbis, the Sanhedrin, the Dead Sea community, other seers and preachers, freedom fighters. Most of the alternatives disappeared after the collapse of the Bar Kochba revolt in the year 135, leaving only two options: a Judaism of the rabbis which enabled a way of life without land or temple, and a messianic group later called Christians. But because Jesus had been utterly Jewish and his initial followers almost exclusively Jewish, both of

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[4] Particularly through the work of Jacob Neusner. For an accessible presentation of the issue see Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner, *Judaism in the New Testament: Practices and Beliefs* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

these movements were Jewish and had almost the same moral traditions and almost the same social structures. (24-5)

Thus far Yoder was simply drawing on recent developments to confirm his understanding of Judaism in this period. It was in the drawing out of implications that he was more original: neither Jesus nor Paul nor the apostolic communities rejected normative Judaism. What Jesus proposed for his listeners was nothing other than what he claimed was the normative vision for a restored and clarified Judaism in the light of the New Age which he heralded. Similarly the apostle Paul never surrendered his claim that a true child of Abraham must share the faith in the son of the promise made to Abraham, and, though he entered the ongoing debate about how much of the Jewish lifestyle should be expected of proselytes and God-fearers, he never suggested that his own (Jewish) disciples should be anything other than good Jews. (26-7)[5] The expression "the Jews" in the Fourth Gospel should be taken as referring to those people who today would be called "the establishment", a relatively small group of men wielding institutional power, and they ceased to exist after the year 70. (27-28)[6]

These two considerations required a conclusion: the Jews did not reject Christianity. (28) The temple at Jerusalem remained open to believers in Jesus until its destruction, and there was no general expulsion of Christians from synagogues until at least the end of the first century. The few accounts of persecution of believers in Jesus by Jewish authorities that are found in the New Testament indicate that these referred to unofficial matters of discipline internal to the Jewish community. Yoder dismissed the *Birkat ha-minim* hypothesis[7] on good historical grounds; there could hardly have been a

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[5] Yoder cited (86) the retrieval of the Jewishness of Paul by Alan Segal in *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), and by Mark Nanos in *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

[6] For the latest discussion of "anti-Judaism" in the fourth Gospel which makes this argument, see Stephen Motyer, *Your Father the Devil?: A New Approach to John and 'the Jews'* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 1997).

[7] The story of the introduction of the "benediction against the heretics" (actually a malediction) is told in the Talmud. The hypothesis is that the primary, if not the sole, target of this curse was the Christians, and that it both expressed and exacerbated the seriousness of the Jewish-Christian schism. It has been influential since the publication of J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

general purge of men suspected of honouring Jesus since the Mishnah included the sayings of such men.[8] This led to the important statement:

> The incompatibility of faith in Jesus with Jewish identity is thus not the point of departure for the problem of Jewish and Christian relationships.... The development of... incompatibility represents rather a departure from the original, tense but tolerable overlapping of Jewish and Christian identities. (32)

Yoder identified the first clear presence of perceived incompatibility in the writings of Justin Martyr (ca. 135), who drove a wedge between two kinds of Christians: those who, following Paul, kept the border open between themselves and Jewry, and those who, like himself, turned their back on the Jews in the interest of making more sense to the Gentiles. (32) Whereas Paul had been a Judaizer of the Greeks, the apologists tried to show the Gentiles that they could have the Christian God without the Jews. As far as the Christian side was concerned, the Schism might be said to have begun as a doctrinal position at this point.[9] If Justin's need for Gentile respectability had not led him to be ready to split the church, the rabbis might not have reciprocated in kind. (41)

At this point Yoder's argument became controversial. Justin's apologetic approach has been strongly defended by Francis Watson in "A Study of Early Christian Old Testament Interpretation."[10] Yet Watson's attention to Christology means that he does not deal with the ecclesiological options that Yoder exposed,[11] and so Yoder's point still holds good. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition the work of the bishops (such as Irenaeus and the Cappadocians) is regarded as more representative of the position of the church

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[8] Yoder welcomed (86n21) the detail provided by James Dunn in *The Partings of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London & Philadelphia: SCM & TPI, 1991), but pointed out the basic conceptual inadequacies of the metaphor of two "ways" which part at a particular point, and criticised Dunn for following the *minim* hypothesis. For a clear statement of the issues, see Stephen G. Wilson, *Related Strangers: Jews and Christians, 70-170 C. E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 179-183.

[9] Yoder argued that those, like Rosemary Radford Ruether in *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), who derived the Jewish-Christian schism from Christology must project back into first century messianic language meanings which phrases like "son of God" could not have then had - since they developed very early in Jewish Christian congregations. (34)

[10] Francis Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 305-329.

[11] Yoder would find support in Jeffrey S. Siker, *Disinheriting the Jews: Abraham in Early Christian Controversy* (Louisville, Ken.: Westminster/John Knox, 1991).

than that of the philosophical theologians (such as Origen and the apologists).[12] Given our discussion in chapter 2, Yoder raised a very serious ecclesiological question, one which perhaps could only be raised by someone from a tradition schooled in doubt about Patristic ecclesiology.

All serious historical hypotheses placed the beginning of the implementation of the division from the rabbinic side no earlier than 135, a full century after Pentecost. (35) What became normative Judaism was not established until the redaction of the Mishnah at least a century later[13] but whatever the date, Judaism *so defined* was younger than Christianity. (39) The Judaism of the Mishnah, being post-schism, was committed to being non- or anti-messianic (in a very few parts). The rabbis came to need a way to affirm that Gentiles could please God in other ways than by keeping the law and gathering in synagogues, and so developed an appeal to the covenant of God with Noah. (40) The Judaism of Jeremiah through the time of Jesus until the disaster of AD 70 had been a missionary faith: it was only after the division between Jews and Christians was established that Judaism dampened its missionary openness and became an ethnic enclave. Nonmissionary Judaism was a product of Christian history. (75)

The division between Judaism and Christianity was probably not final until Christians came into political power in the fourth century, thereby changing not only the resources at their disposal for dealing with adversaries, but also the social meaning of their own faith. (36) Yet we know that "middle party" groups, called "Ebionite" or "Jewish Christians" by critical "orthodox" bishops, had fellowship and debated both with Jews and with Gentiles inclined to anti-semitism, and survived for centuries.[14] For generations non-messianic and messianic Jews and messianically missionized Gentiles could continue to read the Tanach together, pray together, break bread together and

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[12] Witness John D. Zizioulas, "The fact that neither the apologists, such as Justin Martyr, nor the Alexandrian catechetical theologians, such as the celebrated Clement and Origen, could completely avoid the trap of the ontological monism of Greek thought is not accidental: they were above all "doctors," academic theologians interested principally in Christianity as "revelation." By contrast, the bishops of this period... approached the being of God through the experience of the ecclesial community, of *ecclesial being*." *Being As Communion* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's, 1993), 16.

[13] Wilson places this "somewhere around the end of the second century CE;" in *Related Strangers*, 23.

[14] Yoder instanced the sermons of Origen (86) and John Chrysostom (86, 38).

consider themselves part of one people of God, however strained and threatened, one family of Abraham under the heels of the emperors of Rome. (41)

The mainstream Christian faith became an ahistorical moral monotheism, with no particular peoplehood and no defences against acculturation, no ability to discern the line between mission and syncretism. (76) When dominant Christianity lost its Jewish roots, it also lost its vision of the whole globe as under God, with all nations (i.e., even beyond the Roman empire, even including its enemies) seen as having their place and needing to hear their message. Christianity lost its capacity for decentralized congregationalism and was ready to function as the ceremonial ratification of the Byzantine court. Christians lost their understanding of Torah as grace and as privilege, replacing it with morality as requirements for salvation. (77) All this was possible because Christians had been busy since the second century weakening the Hebrew awareness that law is a form of grace.

> Hellenistic apologetes felt that the Jewishness of Torah would keep them from reaching unbelievers. Reformers feared it would let religious performance stand in the way of saving grace. Both of these forms of anti-Judaism have profoundly impoverished us.... Thinking that we are freed from the law instead of *through and for* the grace of Torah is the root of the anomie of our age....[15]

We may observe that in the mid 1970s Yoder had begun to treat the standard account of the first centuries of the Christian era with a suspicion which scholarship of the late 1980s and 1990s has come to endorse, at least in the matter of the complexity of the separation between Judaism and Christianity. Understanding the New Testament writings in their original context, he denied that they contain anything anti-Jewish or non-Jewish (unless they were read in the light of later Christian prejudice). He identified historical evidence of ongoing interactions between Jews and Christians and read this as

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[15] Yoder, *For The Nations*, 213. In an unpublished paper from 1963, "Christian Living," Yoder had written that the fatal flaw of the sixteenth century was "the effort to open all doors with the one beautiful key of forgiveness by grace alone through faith alone." It seemed to follow that since pious works do not earn forgiveness they were of no use. Though Luther did not think this, his preoccupation with forgiveness and opposition to the monastic merit system "kept him from rediscovering that the Gospel promises not only forgiveness but also obedience by Grace alone through faith alone. To this day in common Protestant usage, "salvation" means forgiveness of sins but not obedience in fellowship. "Grace" means forgiveness rather than enablement." (p5 of "Obedience") For a similar criticism of the Augustinian-Lutheran dichotomy of grace and law see Walter Brueggemann, "Duty as Delight and Desire: Preaching Obedience that is not Legalism," in *The Covenanted Self: Explorations in Law and Covenant* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 35-47.

a witness to the viability of an apostolic practice of fellowship with Jewish people which was an alternative to the antagonism articulated by "mainstream" Christian preachers and theologians.[16] If "normative Christianity" were to be defined by the Apostolic writings (without reading them through subsequent anti-Jewish history), no split between Christian and Jewish people would be required. As far as this subject was concerned, the key period of our era was the second century, since novel paths had been chosen in its middle years which later became dominant. There was a need for Christians to repent of these paths. (41)[17]

5.1.3 The Debate Concerning Supersessionism

In the half century since the Second World War there has been a growing recognition within many Christian churches that the history of Christendom contains much shameful treatment of the Jewish people, and a number of theologians have begun to question the relationship between the Christian church and the Jewish people, which has traditionally been conceived of in terms of supersession.[18] In this climate, Yoder was alert to the understandable fear of addressing truth questions, (42) but he was not prepared to reject the Christology of the apostolic scriptures on the ground that later abuse of it was anti-Jewish. (44)

Yoder's stance in this debate can be illuminated by comparison with one recent proposal concerning Judaism and Christianity in the work of R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*. Early in this book Soulen states that "The fundamental reality of Judaism is the corporeal election of Abraham's children. Everything else, even

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[16] A reading of early church history which treats the standard account with similar suspicion is that of Liberation Theologian, Eduardo Hoornaert, *The Memory of the Christian People*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Tunbridge Wells, Kent: Burns & Oats, 1989).

[17] For a similar, though less detailed, view see Kornelius H. Miskotte, *When the Gods are Silent*, trans. John Doberstein (London: Collins, 1967): "Had not Christendom already in the second century largely lost the knowledge that its God was the God of Israel; did it ever enter its mind that Israel's election was the root of its salvation?" Modern criticism of Christianity "is the end of the road that began by putting first in place the metaphysical God, the ontological cosmos, natural law, providence, *amor fati*, and thereby dimmed the light of the God of Israel." (308, 309)

[18] See especially the major three part work of Paul van Buren, *A Theology of Jewish-Christian Reality* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980, 1983, 1988). For an assessment of van Buren's work on this subject, together with the contributions of Karl Barth and Jürgen Moltmann, see Stephen R. Haynes, *Prospects for Post-Holocaust Theology* AARAS 77 (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars, 1991).

Torah, rests upon this." He is heavily dependent upon the work of the Jewish theologian, Michael Wyschogrod, and quotes his memorable description of Israel as "the carnal anchor that God has sunk into the soil of creation."[19] But this begs the question: is God's covenant with Israel an eternal covenant with the physical descendants of Jacob? Yoder read Israel's story quite differently.

> There was evidently in ancient Israel an ethnic base, and (for a few centuries) there was a royal state structure (or two). Yet that "nation" was a very permeable unity. Provisions were made both formally and informally for the assimilation of the stranger and sojourner. The function of both the priest and prophet was to invite an uncoerced, voluntary response of the "heart" (a very personalistic and voluntaristic term, present already in the ancient texts) to the covenant initiative of YHWH.[20]

He went on to illustrate what he called the "free-church" dimension of Israel as a confessing community of moral identity by reference to the distinctive ethic required in the processional Psalms 24 and 15 with their question, "who may ascend the hill of YHWH?". The freedom and history of that community, catechised by the priests, leading the ark of YHWH into the Temple was defined by Torah, it was not a biological community nor a nation state.

A narrative reading of the origins of Israel in the Scriptures[21] surely confirms Yoder's view of Israel as a "permeable unity" and as requiring response to YHWH's covenant initiative. Firstly, when Israel spoke of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob it had already introduced into the notion of election the element of differentiation among biological offspring. Although God was said to be with Ishmael (Gen 21:20), and Esau

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[19] R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), quotations from p6 & 7. This has received a certain recognition in that it is cited for further reading in *The Cambridge Handbook of Christian Theology*, ed. Colin Gunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 100.

[20] Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 10.

[21] Such a narrative reading (though in contrast to the various hypothetical historical-critical reconstructions, may nevertheless pay attention to historical critical work) is essential to a theological reading of Scripture. The recognition of the significance of narrative for theology has been growing; a collection of writings on the subject is *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, edd. Stanley Hauerwas & L. Gregory Jones (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1989). A narrative approach is taken in the recent critically informed work of Bruce C. Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim & David L. Peterson, *A Theological Imtroduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, Ten.: Abingdon, 1999). Among New Testament theologians who give prominence to a narrative reading of Israel's story is Ben Witherington, *Paul's Narrative Thought World: The Tapestry of Tragedy and Triumph* (Louisville, Ken.: Westminster/John Knox, 1994).

was not without a blessing (Gen 27:39) or descendants in the land of Edom (Gen 34:1-43), these offspring of Abraham were not part of the chosen people. The very fact that Israel was named after Abraham's grandson, whilst regarding Abraham as its father, was a reminder that ethnic descent, though immensely significant, was not sufficient to constitute election.

Secondly, Israel was a "permeable unity" at the time of the Exodus of ethnic Israel from Egypt, since "a mixed crowd also went up with them" (Exod 12:38; cf. Num 11:4), and provision was made for foreigners to be circumcised (Exod 12:43-49; Num 9:14). On entry into the promised land Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute, was permitted to live and become part of Israel because of her acknowledgement of YHWH (Josh 6:25, cf., 8:33-5).[22] It is true that there are some laws embedded in the story which show resistance towards ethnic outsiders, such as the restrictions on admission to the assembly of the YHWH (Deut 23:3-8), yet for evidence that this resistance was motivated less by ethnic concerns than by those of loyalty to YHWH we have only to remember the story of Ruth. In the post-exilic community, a major concern of Ezra and Nehemiah was the marriage of Israelites to outsiders (Ezra 9-10; Neh 9:2; 10:28; 13:1-3, 23-29). It would be convenient to my argument to understand this concern as an expression of an exclusive sense of election which had been further narrowed to the returning exiles[23] - since this would mean that election was on some basis other than patrilineal. However, these exiles had previously been joined at Passover by all who had "separated themselves from the pollutions of the nations of the lands to worship YHWH the God of Israel" (Ezra 6:21),[24] so we should understand the drastic insistence upon divorce not in terms of a narrowed ethnic election, but in terms of this community's desire to preserve covenant loyalty and obedience to the God of Israel, i.e., as a reflection of the motive for the original

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[22] Whilst, to anticipate my next paragraph, Achan, the Israelite whose covetousness led him to break YHWH's explicit command, was put to death with all his family (Josh 7). Commenting on these stories (and that of the Gibeonites in Josh 9), Robert B. Coote observes: "Those who submit may be saved and included, while those who rebel will be excluded and exterminated." "The Book of Joshua," *NIB* Vol.II (1998), 625.
[23] As suggested by B. W. Anderson in his standard textbook, *The Living World of the Old Testament* (London: Longman, 1988[4]), 516.
[24] According to H. G. M. Williamson, "these should be regarded as proselytes." *Ezra, Nehemiah* WBC 16 (Waco, Texas: Word, 1985), 85.

separation from the people of the land (Ezra 9:1 reflects the stereotyped list of foreign nations in Gen 15:19; Exod 3:8, 17; 33:2; 34:11 and Deut 7:1).[25] The possibility that foreigners might "join themselves to YHWH" was clearly envisaged in the postexilic Isa 56:3.

Thirdly, throughout Israel's story it is apparent that the privileges of membership of Israel were not simply by birth but by response to YHWH's covenant: Moses demanded, "Who is on YHWH's side? Come to me!" (Exod 32:26); Joshua challenged the people to "Choose this day whom you will serve" (Josh 24:15). Elijah required the same decision, "How long will you go limping with two different opinions?" (1 Kgs 18:21) and his subsequent encounter with YHWH at Horeb showed that faithful Israel amounted to a mere "seven thousand" (1 Kgs 19:18). Thus the prophets came to speak of the remnant, a minority within physical Israel who were faithful to YHWH, and through whom YHWH could fulfil his promises and purposes (Isa 7:3; 10:20-22; 28:5). The prophets continually struggled with the presumption that physical membership of Israel relieved the people of covenant obligations to the extent of declaring that they had broken the covenant (Jer 11:10) and had to be driven into exile before there could be renewal.

These features of Israel's story require the conclusion that Israel could never be wholly identified with those who claimed to be Israelites by birth. This is borne out by the fact that by the time of the New Testament, there were several different groups within ethnic Judaism who saw themselves as the true Israel (e.g., the Qumran community). Yoder was alive to the complexity of this issue.

> The stream of Jewish population and culture was not firmly definable by any of the standard criteria: it was ethnic, but more than that; it was geographic, but more than that; it was ethical, but with considerable leeway in details of compliance.... Yet the inadequacy of these definitions does not mean that Jewishness was vague." (37)

It is clear that when Soulen says that "the fundamental reality of Judaism is the corporeal election of Abraham's children," he can only be talking about the Judaism that

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[25] See further, Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, "Between Ezra and Isaiah: exclusion, transformation, and inclusion of the "foreigner" in post-exilic biblical theology," in *Ethnicity and the Bible*, ed. Mark G. Brett (London, New York, Koln: E. J. Brill, 1996), 117-142.

became dominant from the second Christian century onwards. Wyschogrod's contention that Israel is "the carnal anchor that God has sunk into the soil of creation," places an exaggerated Judaeocentricity at the heart of creation since God's commitment to carnality had begun with the creation of humanity in the first place according to Genesis. Thus I would conclude that Yoder's reading of Israel's story is much more nuanced and convincing than Soulen's.

Yoder rejected the notion of supersessionism as a distortion of Pauline categories, and instead employed the New Testament language of "fulfilment" which implied "a permanently open border between what went before and what comes next." (72) In other words, the status of Jesus as Messiah should be a matter of ongoing discussion between two parties, both within the Jewish heritage. In this debate Christians must continue to claim that the Jesus whom they follow is the one to whom the Jews still look forward, recognising that their (Christian) tradition gave up the most authentic and original form of that claim when it granted the right of non-Messianic Jews to exclude Christians from their synagogues and then slid culturally into increasing Romanization and Hellenization. (72f)[26]

Yoder's conclusion called for a much more profound repentance on the part of the Christian church than a simple renunciation of supersessionism and an effective adoption of a two-covenant view. Where Soulen calls for "the church, above all its Gentile portion, to cease organized mission efforts among the Jewish people," (173) Yoder was not prepared to abandon the implications of New Testament Christology.[27] He perceived a profound parallel between the story of the Jews and that of the Radical Reformers and the free church vision which they bequeathed. (74-87) A tradition of Christianity which experienced much suffering at the hands of "Christian" Europe was in a unique position to reach out to the Jewish people after the Holocaust. But perhaps a more general turning

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[26] Yoder made further valuable distinctions within an essay suggesting that Judaism should be seen by Christians concerned with mission as a non-non-Christian religion. (113-124).

[27] Another approach to the two covenant theory is given by Norbert Lohfink, *The Covenant Never Revoked: Biblical Reflections on Christian-Jewish Dialogue* trans. John J. Scullion (New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 1991).

to the Jewish people on the part of the Christian church might achieve something the free churches have not:

> Whether the impact be commonality or dialogue, confession of guilt or joy in reconciliation, to restore the recognition of the sister communion might just call Christians back to their roots as the free church minorities in the West have been failing to do. (82)

Having made this point, I acknowledge that aspects of Soulen's critique of the marginalization of Israel's story in the work of key Christian theologians are perceptive. Despite Irenaeus' defense of the place of Israel's Scriptures and portrayal of Israel's role as integral to God's education of the human race, his organization of the Scriptures in the light of four key events (God's creation of the world through the Logos for the purpose of consummation, Adam's fall, redemption through the Logos, final consummation) meant that he conceived of "God's work as Consummator in a manner formally independent of God's election of Israel and its life among the nations." (43) Irenaeus did not formulate the specific calling of the church amid the world as a fulfilment of the specific calling of Israel among the nations.[28] This failure to root ecclesiology in the tradition of Israel's calling was of a piece with the second century move away from its Jewish heritage which Yoder identified.

5.1.4 Conclusion

Yoder called himself an amateur in the field of the history of the Jewish-Christian Schism, yet he had a profound grasp of the interpretive and theological issues involved. He noted that his suggestions appeared somewhat original in 1971 and 1977, but by 1996 were on the way to becoming a generally accepted wisdom (24 n10). This is borne out by recent studies such as that by Stephen G. Wilson, *Related Strangers*.[29] Yoder's grasp of the theological identity of Israel as YHWH's covenant people was perceptive and convincing, and his view of the question of supersession was profound as well as unusual.

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[28] My guides on Irenaeus have been Denis Minns, *Irenaeus* OCTS (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994); Robert M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons* ECF (London & New York: Routledge, 1997); Douglas Farrow, "Irenaeus of Lyons: The Church and the World" *Pro Ecclesia* IV/3 (1995), 333-55.
[29] See note 8 above.

His novel proposal concerning the beginning of an ecclesiology dismissive of the Jewish people should be taken seriously. Other theologians, such as Soulen,[30] are proposing something similar, and I have not come across reasons to doubt its cogency. His particularly nuanced call for repentance on the part of the attitude towards the Jewish people on the part of Christian churches must be heard.

5.2 Reading the Jewish Story in the Scriptures

In several essays Yoder discussed the story of God's people in the Hebrew Scriptures,[31] and the most important theme which he found there was that of the faithful pilgrim minority. There were a number of founder figures who left behind the security and at-homeness with which religion is normally concerned, and by their faithfulness contributed to a non-standard definition of God. "Abraham left Chaldea, Moses left Egypt and Jeremiah left Jerusalem. Of all of these, Jeremiah is perhaps the most important" - for it was only after they had left their homeland and found a way to maintain their identity elsewhere, without Jerusalem and without Temple, that the "Judeans" became "the Jews".[32] So I will begin by examining this emphasis upon Jeremiah before considering the claim that Jewish existence after the exile is normative. The story of the monarchy will then be treated in the light of this normativity, including comparison with other work on Old Testament theology.

5.2.1 Jeremiah and the Beginning of the Diaspora

Jeremiah's letter to the exiles in Babylon (Jer 29:1-9) signalled a new phase in the existence of God's people. The transfer of the exiles to the imperial capital

> is of course understood as in some sense the earned chastisement for the sins of the people (or more properly of their ruling elites), but that is not the primary

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[30] Fredrick C. Holmgren describes an emerging centre in scholarship concerning *The Old Testament and the Significance of Jesus: Embracing Change - Maintaining Christian Identity* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1999).

[31] Mostly in the collection, "The Jewish Christian Schism..." One of these, "See How They Go with Their Face to the Sun" was published in *For the Nations*, 51-78.

[32] "The Jewish Christian Schism...," 15, 54f; *For the Nations*, 41.

> point made by Jeremiah when he interprets the event in the light of God's gracious sovereignty. It is the false prophets who promise that the captivity will soon be over, a mere detour along the triumphal path of the house of David.[33]

Yoder's interpretation of Jeremiah's letter was "You'll be in Babylon a long time. Seek the peace of *that* city. Identify your welfare with theirs. Abandon the vision of statehood."[34]

This last sentence was a major theological rereading of Jeremiah's written oracle: superficially Yoder's reading appears mistaken at several points. Firstly, the oracular letter itself continued with a promise that there would be a return from exile, albeit after seventy years (29:10-14), and this implied that the exile, though extended, was not permanent. Secondly, the following chapters in the book of Jeremiah contain many oracles of hope for the restoration of Israel, envisaging the restoration of land (32:37-41), and culminating in the assurance that there would be a reuniting of the two families (i.e., Israel and Judah) as one nation (33:23-26), under the rule of "a righteous Branch" sitting on the throne with levitical priests offering sacrifices (33:14-18; cf. 30:9, 21):[35] all these promises did envision the revival of statehood. Thirdly, it was not only Jeremiah who made such promises, for Ezekiel's oracles of hope included the same themes (on the monarchy see 34:23f; 37:22-25; cf. 44:3; 45:7-8: 45:21-46:12; 48:21). It seems that post-exilic prophets picked up the same themes as they entertained the hope that the governor of Judah, Zerubbabel, would assume a royal role (Hag 2:23; Zech 4:6b-10a).

However, the ambition for Zerubbabel did not come to fruition and concern for restoration of the monarchy diminished in later post-exilic oracles, being transposed into a more distant eschatological hope.[36] Although the temple was completed and the walls

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[33] Yoder, *For the Nations*, 65.
[34] Yoder, "Exodus and Exile: The Two Faces of Liberation," *Missionalia* 2 (April 1974), 38.
[35] In addition, although Jeremiah's previous criticism of most of Israel's kings, apart from Josiah, had been devastating (22:1-23:4), it had been followed by a similar promise to David (23:5-8).
[36] Compared with Haggai's usage of "governor" and patronymics of Zerubbabel, Zechariah deliberately avoids these. "For Zechariah the expectation that Zerubbabel or any Davidide would ascend the throne and reestablish kingship is one that is remote if not impossible." Carol L. Meyers & Eric M. Myers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8* AB 25B (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1987), 243. So there is doubt as to whether Zechariah's vision was that of "a real-life political program." Ben C. Ollenburger, "The Book of Zechariah" in *NIB* vol. VII (Nashville, Ten.: Abingdon, 1996), 739.

of Jerusalem eventually rebuilt, Yoder was correct to say that "Ezra and Nehemiah re-establish[ed] the community precisely without national sovereignty"[37] for they were aware of their slave status within the Persian empire (Ezr 9:9; Neh 9:36).[38] Once in the Persian empire, "Nothing like "kingship" or "statehood" is advocated by any party as desirable for the honour of God or the dignity of the people."[39] As on other occasions, events did not transpire quite as foreseen by the prophets,[40] and thus was produced a conviction that something remained on God's agenda for Messianic fulfilment.[41] The result was that more Jews remained in Babylon and elsewhere than returned to live in Judah, and the exhortation of Jeremiah's letter (which originally envisaged no more than a medium term application) came to have a longer-term ongoing relevance. The diaspora became an unforeseen extension of the exilic interim before the completion of the messianic restoration of Israel. In this prophetic-historical sense Yoder's rereading of Jeremiah's letter to the exiles holds good.

5.2.2 Diaspora as Normal Jewish Existence

Drawing on the poem-drama *Jeremiah* which the German-speaking Jew, Stephan Zweig, wrote during World War 1, Yoder affirmed that for the Jews to be scattered was not a hiatus after which normalcy would resume, not a seventy year detour, but a new phase of the Mosaic project, the beginning of the mission of the next millennium and a half.

> Zweig's vision, like Jeremiah's letter, makes the hope of a return to Jerusalem functional *as postponed*. The notion of return has its meaning not as something the people in Babylon or elsewhere should be bringing about in their own

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[37] Yoder, "Exodus and Exile", 38.
[38] Thus by the first Christian century, most Jews would have understood that they were still in exile, according to N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992), 268-272.
[39] Yoder, *For the Nations*, 60
[40] Perhaps the most obvious example of prophetic non-fulfilment is of Ezekiel's oracle that Tyre would meet its doom by Nebuchadnezzar's army (Ezek 26:7-14). See Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37* AB22A (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1997), 616-618.
[41] The origin of the Messianic idea in prophetic literature is most likely to be found in the book of Isaiah. See e.g., Daniel Schibler, "Messianism and Messianic Prophecy in Isaiah 1-12 and 28-33" in *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite, Richard S. Hess & Gordon J. Wenham (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 1995), 98-104.

> strength, or waiting around to see happen, or planning for. It is functional as metaphor for God's renewing the life of faith anywhere.[42]

He drew attention to the connection between the act of selecting (a better term might be 'recognizing') a particular body of literature which defined who a people are and the social setting in which that act occurs. The Hebrew scriptural canon reflected diaspora, *galuth*, as normal Jewish existence[43] and therefore relativized the significance of Exodus as a model for the experience of God's people.[44] The stories of Daniel and Esther, and also the ancestor Joseph, depicted the world of God's people living amid the empire. Certain of the Psalms reflected painful alienation away from YHWH's land (Ps 137), while others were used on pilgrimages back to Jerusalem (Pss 120-134).

> The places named [in the latter], Meshech and Kedar, are neither in Mesopotamia nor in Palestine. One is in Arabia and the other in Anatolia; they testify to the resilience of Jewish identity all across the Ancient Near East... More than Christians are aware, Babylon itself very soon became the cultural centre of world Jewry, from the time of Jeremiah until the time we in the West call the Middle Ages. The people who recolonized the "Land of Israel," repeatedly, from the age of Jeremiah to that of Johanan ben Zakkai, and again still later, were supported financially and educationally from Babylon, and in lesser ways from the rest of the diaspora. Our Palestinocentric reading of the story is a mistake, though a very understandable one.[45]

An important element of diaspora Jewry which Yoder identified was its stance of "not being in charge"; its acceptance of a role other than conventional political control. There were two exceptions to this stance, but both ultimately failed. First, those who concentrated on rebuilding and managing the temple at Jerusalem with the political and financial backing of the Empires of Persia and Rome, the elite from Ezra and Nehemiah[46] to the Sanhedrin, did their best to defend traditional Jewish values, but ultimately failed. Second, the Maccabees fought against the proud and oppressive Seleucid empire with some initial success, yet subsequently fell prey to what they

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[42] Yoder, *For the Nations*, 53 & 52.
[43] Yoder, *For the Nations*, 55f.
[44] See also Yoder, "Exodus and Exile," and "Withdrawal and Diaspora: The Two Faces of Liberation" in *Freedom and Discipleship: Liberation Theology in Anabaptist Perspective* ed. David S. Schipani (Maryknoll. N.Y.: Orbis, 1989), 76-84.
[45] Yoder, *For the Nations*, 57.
[46] For details of this argument, see Yoder, *For the Nations*, 74.

claimed to have defeated. The Zealots and Bar Kochba fought the Romans with disastrous consequences and the "Judaism" which survived after their last defeat in 135 assumed the same stance which Jewry everywhere else but in Palestine had taken. Belief in God's sovereignty meant that they did not need to attempt to seize or subvert the current order and that the ultimate righteous order among the nations would be the mission of the Messiah.[47]

5.2.3 The Israelite Monarchy in the Light of Normative Jewish Existence

Having established the normative character of diaspora existence for the Jews, Yoder was able to pronounce a negative verdict on Israel's experiment with kingship.

> Israelite identity was not defined first by a theoretical monotheism, by cult or kaschrut, nor by the decalogue. It was rather defined by the claim of the tribes to "have no king but JHWH/Adonai"... [And so] "Trust in JHWH/Adonai" is what opens the door to His saving intervention. It is the opposite of making one's own political/military arrangements. Jeremiah's abandoning statehood for the future is thus not so much forsaking an earlier hope as it is returning to the original trust in JHWH."[48]

Israel's early resistance to an earthly king in Jotham's fable (Judges 9:7), Samuel's response to the elders' demand in 1 Sam 8, and the law of the king in Deut 17:14ff bore witness to an awareness of the oppressive nature of conventional human kingship.[49] Yoder's verdict on the long story of the northern and southern kingdoms was that

> God finally gave up on both of them. The historiography which scholars call "deuteronomic" and "deuteronomistic" retold the history, correlating the ups and downs of the royal houses with their rising and falling faithfulness to the law, but when we remember that the retelling was done and committed to writing in the setting of the diaspora, it constitutes a document of the acceptance of the Jeremianic turn; there is in the multiple strata and versions of the entire narrative no irridentism.[50]

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[47] Yoder, "This was what the mainstream critics of Zionism said a century ago, and what the *neturei karta* community says of the State of Israel even today." (*For the Nations*, 67)
[48] Yoder, "The Jewish Christian Schism...," 48. I would add that a number of passages in the Pentateuch explicitly characterise YHWH as Israel's king (Exod 15:18; Num 23:21; Deut 33:5) and these are complemented by long stretches of covenant-making material in Exod 19-24, including the issuing of commands by YHWH in the first person (Exod 20:1-22), something a king would do.
[49] Yoder, *For the Nations*, 60 & 75.
[50] Yoder, *For the Nations*, 60. I assume that "irridentism" here means a return to the old monarchic boundaries.

Despite the prophecies of a restoration of the monarchy that we considered earlier, Yoder could assert that "With Jeremiah God abandoned Kingship, as a vehicle of his people's identity." Furthermore,

> Because a theologically and sociologically coherent strategy for renouncing civil kingship as the instrument for the renewal of the people of God was already present in the heritage, it was no surprise that Jewry could disengage itself from the Maccabean/Zealot adventures and proceed not only unshaken but renewed and refined by these collapses.[51]

We may conclude that Yoder developed a coherent way of reading the story of God's people from

(i) Abraham and the patriarchs, through

(ii) liberation and wilderness wandering under the leadership of Moses, and

(iii) the early theocracy in the land, while accounting for

(iv) the monarchical period, to

(v) the exile and diaspora.

The last of these periods he regarded as normative (though it had certain parallels in the first and second) and paradigmatic for the Christian church. The third and fourth periods in which Israel existed as a discrete, landholding nation-state of the Ancient Near East remained significant, but had less direct relevance and contained a clear warning against adopting a human monarchy.

5.2.4 Comparison with Two Other Approaches to Old Testament Theology

Since I am arguing that Yoder's approach to the Old Testament is fundamental to his ecclesiology, and his emphasis upon the Diaspora as normal Jewish existence is methodologically significant, some probing of these views is essential. In particular, anabaptist theology asks serious questions of Israel's monarchy because it sees monarchical elements within episcopalian ecclesiology. It will be instructive to compare Yoder's view with those of the Anglican Old Testament Theologian, John Goldingay, and then to consider the approach to Biblical theology known as Canonical Criticism, from which Yoder derived his view.

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[51] Yoder, "The Jewish Christian Schism...," 57, 58.

5.2.4.1 The appeal to historical necessity by John Goldingay

In his study of *Theological Diversity and the Authority of the Old Testament*, Goldingay examines the theme of the People of God under the rubric of a "contextual approach"; that is, one which acknowledges a variety of viewpoints concerning a particular subject, each of which is potentially instructive. This approach to theological diversity is to be distinguished from both a critical approach which evaluates levels of insight on the basis of criteria internal to the material, and a unifying approach which constructs a coherence out of (rather than claiming to find it within) the material.[52] He explores the meaning of the People of God in each of several historical contexts:

(i) The wandering clan

(ii) The theocratic nation

(iii) The institutional state

(iv) The afflicted remnant

(v) The community of promise.

Goldingay's general discussion of the contextual approach proposes that certain contexts may be more illuminating than others as the "tension between ideal and history" allows varying degrees of truth or depth to emerge. (43) Thus he claims "that the period of the afflicted remnant (before and during the exile) allows the deepest insights on the question to emerge, those associated with the idea of theocracy as it is then juxtaposed with the image of the servant." (59) He sees parallels between Israel's story and the church's story, especially in Israel's turning from a theocracy into a state and the church into an institution accepted by the world under Constantine, and then between Israel's exiled remnant and the church after the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution. (83) This decision "speaks of an openness to learn from the world, to let the world provide the vehicles for expressing the faith, and to attract the world to that faith." (86)

Goldingay understands God's acceptance of the monarchy, in spite of its dubious origins, as a case of God making allowance for human inability to live by God's ideal

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[52] John Goldingay, *Theological Diversity and the Authority of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1987). The three approaches are each given a chapter-length explanation, followed by a chapter-length treatment of a key subject by way of example. Unattributed page references in this sub-subsection refer to this work.

standards. He writes of "a historical inevitability about the transition from (nominally) theocratic nation to monarchic state. The alternative to such a development was to cease to exist." Further, "the theocratic nation especially has to recognize that it is the rebellious nation that cannot exist in the world as the theocracy because of its sin." (70, 85) His justification for this reading is in the historical achievements of David and Solomon, and the comments about the absence of a king at the end of the Book of Judges interpreted as a positive anticipation of human kingship.[53] The key to Goldingay's endorsement of the monarchy lies in his appeal to historical necessity which emerges most clearly in his concluding comments on God's people in the light of the Old Testament:

> It cannot be simply assumed that any of these [five forms of Israel] are intrinsic to being the people of God; *they may simply be the chance results of historical particularities*, part of the context in which Israel had to discover what it means to be the people of God and not part of the meaning itself. We need to look not only at the *historical accidents* of the form of the people of God, the ways in which they could not help following *the drift of history*, but at the way they modified the trajectory. (93, emphasis mine)[54]

However, Goldingay's positive endorsement of the monarchy ignores significant textual material. Even if an early compiler of the Book of Judges (writing during the early monarchy) intended his repeated observation that "there was no king in Israel" (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25) as an indication of the need for a human king, a more theological reading is required for two reasons. First, according to 1 Sam 7, Samuel operating as judge clearly revived Israel's viability as a theocracy by calling Israel to renounce syncretism, and leading them successfully in holy war against the Philistines.[55] Second, although David managed to unite the tribes within one kingdom and Solomon

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[53] Goldingay is followed in this interpretation of the introduction of the monarchy by another Anglican Old Testament scholar, Christopher J. H. Wright in "The People of God and the State," (1980) republished in *Walking in the Ways of the Lord* (Leicester: Apollos, 1995), 225-233.

[54] There is a certain ambivalence about this verdict on the monarchy because Goldingay revisits it after considering the exilic prophets: "the trajectory traced by the motif of the people of God reaches its high point with the theocratic nation, but (to allegorize) blows a fuse at this point which ultimately requires a massive mid-course correction with the afflicted servant." (95) Yet "the vision of the theocratic nation and the vision of the afflicted servant come together in the exile." (96)

[55] Only some commentators on Judges notice this point, e.g., Arthur E. Cundall, *Judges* TOTC (London, IVP, 1968), 213. See now the major work by David Jobling, *1 Samuel: BERIT OLAM Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry* (Collegeville, Min.: The Liturgical Press, 1998), especially chapter 3.

amassed vast wealth, their success was all on the surface. By the time they were gone, idolatry and slavery had been reintroduced; in a short time the kingdom was divided and Shishak sacked the temple (1 Kgs 14:25f). Eventually the monarchic state ceased to exist on account of the sins of the kings at least as much as of the people (2 Kgs 17:7-20; 23:26f; 24:19f). I would propose that "there was no king in Israel" should be read in the light of its canonical (Deuteronomic) context as referring to the effective rejection of YHWH as king (cf., Isa 63:19), exemplified by the idolatry of Micah and the Danites, and by the moral chaos of Gibeah and all Israel, finally ironically united (20:11).[56]

A responsible interpretation of the monarchy must take seriously the sinful nature of Israel's demand for a king, entailing as it did a rejection of YHWH as their king (1 Sam 8:5-8; cf., 10:19; 12:12).[57] This does not deny that YHWH complied with the demand, sinful as it was (1 Sam 8;9, 22);[58] YHWH could take the monarchy into his purposes, particularly through certain rulers who were men "after his own heart," and in the subsequent development of the Messianic hope. Yet the introduction of the monarchy began an erosion of Israel's specific social organization (as Samuel warned, 1 Sam 8:11-18) so that by the eighth century B.C.E. prophets arose who condemned the exploitation of the poor.[59] The Deuteronomic standard for monarchy was thoroughly unconventional

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[56] Note the comment of Barry G. Webb, "by the pointed irony of 19:12 the narrator has implied that the outrage at Gibeah is an act which challenges the very concept of 'Israel' as a distinctive people." *The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 192.

[57] Among historical critical scholars it has been common to assign the rise of the monarchy in 1 Sam 7-12 to two sources, pro- and anti-monarchical, on which see R. P. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel* OTG (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 40-52. However there is currently less confidence about such source analysis and recent literary approaches to this passage promise a more integrated theological result, though have yet to deliver. For a suggestive narrative approach, see Robert Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History. Part Two, 1 Samuel* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 80-125. For some perceptive criticisms of this work see the recent structuralist approach of David Jobling, *1 Samuel* , 59-76.

[58] Elsewhere God seemed to comply with people's requests, even though they were not his original intention (David's intention to build the temple, 2 Sam 7:6-16), and even punished them for them: "he gave them what they asked, but sent a wasting disease among them" (Ps 106:15).

[59] One significant aspect of the development of the state in Israel which followed the introduction of the monarchy was its gradual erosion of the welfare of the ancestral household (*bêt 'ab*), as Samuel had warned. Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The Family in First Temple Israel," in Leo G. Perdue et al, *Families in Ancient Israel* (Louisville, Ken.: Westminster John Knox, 1997, 48-103, here 85-92. Note that after the exile the term "father's house" (*bêt 'ābôt*) referred to a larger unit, appearing to take the place of the traditional clan (*mišpāḥāh*).

and subversive (Deut 17:14-20) to the extent that when Jesus fulfilled that hope it was as a crucified king.

Why does Goldingay's endorsement of the monarchy fail to take into account such significant textual material? In his appeal to historical necessity, he seems to have capitulated to the sort of *realpolitik* which is rejected in the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, and thus overlooked specific criteria by which to assess Israel's choices as the people of God.[60] Goldingay's work here fails to convince because he entertains an understanding of historical necessity which overrides the ethical judgements of the texts read canonically. This has the effect of subordinating the sovereignty of the God of Israel to another entity called "historical necessity".

5.2.4.2 The canonical approach of James A. Sanders

Yoder introduced his view in terms of "the notion of what scholars call "canonization."[61] Although he did not name James Sanders in particular, Yoder's understanding seems to derive from Sanders rather than the other major scholar working with the notion of canon, Brevard Childs[62]. Sanders wrote:

> A canon begins to *take shape* first and foremost because a question of identity or authority has arisen, and a canon begins to *become unchangeable* or invariable somewhat later, after the question of identity has for the most part been settled.[63]

The great upheaval of the Babylonian exile caused Israel to question its identity, and it was this period which was decisive for the formation of what we call the Old Testament canon. Sanders identified the primary nature of the Torah and the secondary nature of the Prophets as Scripture for post-exilic Judaism.

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[60] According to Walter Brueggemann, "The Jeremiah literature is familiar with the realities of imperial politics and is conversant with those modes of thinking. However, Jeremiah does not pursue a *Realpolitik* interpretation of Judah's crisis of termination and displacement, but offers a different, alternative reading of those events. As an alternative to a political analysis, the tradition of Jeremiah proceeds on the basis of a theological perspective." *To Pluck Up, To Tear Down: A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah 1-25* ITC (Grand Rapids/Edinburgh: Eerdmans/The Handsel Press, 1988), 2.

[61] Yoder, *For the Nations*, 55

[62] For a discussion of the canonical approach to Old Testament theology with bibliographical details, see Leo G. Perdue, *The Collapse of History: Reconstructing Old Testament Theology* OBT (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), chapter 6.

[63] James A. Sanders, *Torah & Canon* (Minneapolis: Fortess, 1972), 91.

Israel's pervading identity lay now not with the later phases of the nationalization of her preexilic existence in the grand climaxes of the conquest of Canaan and Jerusalem, but exclusively with what had been at the heart of the early Mosaic or amphictyonic cultic recitals in the first place, but *minus the conquest*.... No longer at the heart of the canon was there any nationalist fulfilment of identity or hope, but rather a service of thanksgiving projected for the time that restoration would take place... [and] Israel in dispersion could cling as long and as often as need be to the unifying hope of returning home...[64]

Sanders' approach has been subjected to some criticism for "affirming pluralism and diversity in the canon, but without addressing the problems that pluralism raises."[65] Yet James Brenneman, a Mennonite theologian, has recently taken up Sanders' canonical approach in conjunction with post-modern literary theory to deal with the issue of pluralism in relation to the subject of violence:

> It makes all the difference in the world whether one reads the Book of Joshua as the endpoint of an early historical credo (hexateuch) or as the first book in the second section of a three part canon. Since Joshua is one of the most violent books in the Bible, the first purely *historical* reading might argue for, and too often has, a socio-political climax of bloody proportion to (any of) Yahweh's promises. The second *canonical* reading would understand the book of Joshua as having been deliberately excised from the historical credo and the first canon of Scripture, the Torah. As such, the Book of Joshua, as it now stands within the canon, introduces a failed history, not a victorious climax to Yahweh's promises of land. The canonical reading is thus a significant sociopolitical statement on the part of the early canon-makers in exile.[66]

In a similar way we could say that Israel's monarchical project, with all its military and political aggrandisement, is given a subordinate position in Israel's self-understanding through a canonical reading.

Donn F. Morgan has explored the third part of the canon, the "Writings", from a canonical perspective[67], but it is James L. Mays who has demonstrated the theological message of the Psalms as a canonical book in terms of YHWH's reign.

> The coherence and reference of the psalmist's language world is based on a sentence on which all that is said in the psalms depends. Everything else is connected to what this one sentence says. It is a liturgical cry that is both a declaration of faith and a statement about reality. In Hebrew the sentence is

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[64] Ibid., 44ff.
[65] Perdue, *The Collapse of History*, 189 n87.
[66] James E. Brenneman, *Canons in Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,, 1997), 46.
[67] Donn F. Morgan, *Between Text and Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990).

> composed of only two words: the proper name of Israel's god and the verb for becoming, being and acting as a sovereign. The sentence is "*Yhwh malak*," "the LORD reigns."[68]

The only other part of the writings which might appear to advocate a human monarchy are the Books of Chronicles. We know that the Davidic covenant began to be interpreted during the exile in a new, "democratizing" way in Isa 55:3,[69] and this verse is alluded to in 2 Chron 6:42. So it seems that the emphasis upon divine faithfulness to the Davidic covenant in these books, written deep in the Persian period, is to be taken as a reassurance to the whole people,[70] together with the germ of later messianic developments.[71]

This brief survey of the canonical approach to the Old Testament confirms the importance of the exilic and post-exilic period for Israel and Israel's Scriptures. It reinforces the significance of YHWH's rule as opposed to any conventional human monarchy or nationalistic aspirations.

5.2.4.3 Observation

It seems that it is Mennonite scholars who are among the most alive to the socio-political implications of monarchy. Millard Lind wrote of political power in Ancient Israel that "Yahweh's kingship excludes human kingship:"

> On the positive side there is affirmed a divine politics, the "politics of God" who acts immediately upon the human community in grace and judgement, having saved that community by a political act, and having given that community law. On the negative side it regards political power, when wrested from God by the human community, as under the sign of unbelief, and the state itself as an order which mistrusts God and his rule. This radical faith in the immediacy of Yahweh's political leadership was more than a mere belief; it was an experience

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[68] James L. Mays, *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms* (Louisville, Ken.: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 6.

[69] There is little doubt that the dominant royal figure in the book of Isaiah is YHWH's own self (6:5; 9:7c; 24:23; 33:22; 41:21; 43:15; 44:6; 66:1). The prophecies of restoration for Zion beyond chapter 40 contain no reference to a Davidic king, except for 55:3, which extends the everlasting covenant with David to all who will listen. Edgar Conrad has argued that there is further evidence of the democratization of royal traditions in the war oracles of Isa 41-43 in "The Community as King in Second Isaiah", *Understanding the Word*, ed. James T. Butler, Edgar Conrad, Ben C. Ollenburger (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 99-111.

[70] See Martin J. Selman, *1 Chronicles* TOTC (Leicester: IVP, 1994), 50f. For a different view, see H. G. M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles* NCBC (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1982), 220f.

[71] Brian Kelly, "Messianic Elements in the Chronicler's Work," in *The Lord's Anointed*, 249-264.

to which Israel witnesses, an experience from which Israel continually fell away in its first and especially its second adaptive periods [i.e., the periods of the judges and of the kings], an experience to which Israel was called back again and again by the great prophets. Only by a combination of faith and of political events is Ezekiel able to lead a return toward the original vision. This response of faith and unfaith to the political leadership of Yahweh is both the glory and tragedy of Israel's history, and we might add, of the history of the church."[72]

Yoder and Lind were more consistent in their view of God's sovereignty and human responsibility over the demand for a human monarchy, and thus I find that Yoder's decisive choice of the diaspora model as normative for Israel is more convincing than the historical or contextualizing approach to Old Testament theology of Goldingay.

5.2.5 Dispersion as Grace

Yoder's final treatment of the Jewish experience of exile and diaspora was to read it in the light of the Babel story in Genesis 11.[73] He saw the scattering of the tower builders not as a judgement on their hubris, but as an overcoming of their resistance to dispersion, and thus a means of fulfilling the original human calling to fill the earth in Gen 1:28.[74]

> This scattering is still seen as benevolence in the missionary preaching of the Paul of Acts (14:16f.; 17:26f.).... The more we understand the general vision of God as creator and sovereign, the less reason there is to see this intervention as in any way petulant or punitive. (63-4)

Now, "It was the generations of Jewry living around Babylon who told the Babel story as the immediate background to the call of Abraham." (65) Thus, the scattering of the Jews in exile in Babylon and beyond is to be understood as a work of divine grace.

> That transfer is of course understood as in some sense the earned chastisement for the sins of the people (or more properly of their ruling elites), but that is not the primary point made by Jeremiah when he interprets the event in the light of God's gracious sovereignty. It is the false prophets who promise that the

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[72] Millard C. Lind, *Monotheism, Power, Justice: Collected Old Testament Essays* (Elkhart, Ind.: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1990), 141, 143.
[73] Yoder, "See How They Go..." in *For the Nations*, 61-65. Unattributed page numbers in this subsection refer to this essay. Compare the observation of J. Gerald Janzen, "I take Gen 1-11 as much more than a preface to the rest of the Old Testament, which is then understood as primarily the story of the relation between God and Israel. The earlier chapters are the foundation and the continuing frame of reference for that particular story." *Abraham and All the Families of the Earth: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis 12-50* ITC (Grand Rapids, Mi./Edinburgh: Eerdmans/The Handsel Press, 1993), 6.
[74] For a similar reading see Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* IBC (Atlanta, John Knox Press, 1982), 98ff.

> captivity will soon be over, a mere detour along the triumphal path of the house of David. (65)

Thus the *galuth* was a vocation for the Jews.

All this illuminates Christian origins because two important self-concepts of the early Christians were "the dispersion" and "exiles" (Jas 1:1; 1 Pet 1:1; 1:17; 2:11; cf., Heb 11:13).[75] These were supplemented with Babylon imagery in 1 Pet 5:13; Rev 16:19; 17:5; 18:2 & 10),[76] and were coordinate with "heavenly citizenship" (Eph 2:19; Phil 1:27; 3:20; cf., Heb 11:10, 16; 13:14).[77] The early Christians drew upon this normative self-understanding of God's people when they wrote about themselves. Bruce Winter concludes his study of early Christian involvement in society thus:

> All [known] writers accepted the structures of *politeia* as the reality in which they lived. What made the Christians different was the eschatological perspective from which they perceived those structures. They had a paradigm derived from the Jewish Exile or Diaspora in the sixth century BC.[78]

As those who had encountered the grace of God in Jesus Christ taking them beyond the boundary of the Jewish people with the Gospel of that grace, they were fulfilling the sovereign purposes of the Creator God. But they did so following the Jeremianic model, as members of the community of specific allegiance, strangers and exiles in the world. It is thus that the tradition of God's people begins in its Jewish heritage, and that the story of Israel provides a measure even of early Christian tradition.

5.3 The Jewish Community and the Christian Community

What, then, is the relationship between the communities of God's people in Judaism and Christianity? Firstly, I must consider Yoder's positive view of certain features of second temple/diaspora Judaism which meant that he believed that it could provide a model for

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[75] See the articles under "Foreigner, Alien, Dispersion, Stranger" in *NIDNTT* vol. 1, 683-692. Yoder makes this point in *For the Nations*, 40.

[76] "Babylon is a symbol of military power and oppression. Above all is it a place of exile and alienation." Christopher C. Rowland, "Revelation" *NIB* Vol. XII (Nashville, Ten.: Abingdon, 1998), 685.

[77] See the article "πολις" by H. Bietenhard in *NIDNTT* Vol. 2, 801-5.

[78] Bruce W. Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens* (Grand Rapids, Mi./Carlisle, Cumbria: Eerdmans/Paternoster, 1994), 208.

the contemporary church. Yet for all his valuing of the Jewish tradition, Yoder's emphasis upon the newness of the community which Jesus inaugurated requires me to consider, secondly, certain key features of the life of the church so far omitted. Thirdly, I will ponder the tension between these two positions.

5.3.1 The Diaspora Model for the Church in Postmodern Times

The Christian community was no repudiation of Judaism. Yoder's Christological hermeneutic (see §6.1.3) did not negate the Jewish heritage which was God's gift to the world. The God of Abraham, who called his people to faithfulness and service of the world, stood in contrast with the gods of the nations, challenging their wisdom, values and reading of history. There was a striking parallel between first-century, still-Jewish Christians, other Jews then and later, and Christians in the Anabaptist tradition.[79] So we must consider in which ways the church might learn from the Jewish tradition.

Reflection on the life of Diaspora Jewry helped to see how the church could maintain its allegiance to its Lord whilst thoroughly engaged in the life of the wider world, i.e., to answer the charge of "sectarianism," often levelled at Anabaptist ecclesiology.

> The life of diaspora Jewry from Jeremiah to the time of Jesus (and since) was characterized more than we usually remember by its public visibility; synagogue life was observable. In contrast to the Eastern temple cults and mystery religions, Jewish life had no secrets. God-fearing Gentiles could observe and understand what was going on when Jews gathered around their Torah, and many Gentiles were in fact attracted to it. Jews earned their livings providing services to the Gentile economies, sometimes to landlords and rulers. Their cosmopolitan connections made them the best cross-cultural translators, scribes, accountants, educators, and compilers of proverbs. Far from being self-

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[79] "Judaism within Christendom since Constantine has the shape which historians will later call "radical reformation" or "peace church"... For two millennia Judaism has lived its ages of toleration and its ages of renewed exile or even martyrdom, sometimes within and sometimes outside the "Christian" empires of East and West, but never have they reached for the sword. [Yoder took into account both Massada and the Warsaw ghetto uprising by appeal to Rabbi Stephen Schwartzschild. They were aberrations from the normal Jewish commitment of the future to God, under the conventional human misconception that suicidal violence is heroic. (63).] Their literature never justified violence, and in fact created a special genre of literature, the rabbinic rhapsodic "praise of Peace."... They thereby demonstrated pragmatically the ethic of Jeremiah and Jesus. In sum: **the Jews of the Diaspora were for over a millennium the closest thing to the ethic of Jesus** existing on any significant scale anywhere in Christendom." ("The Jewish Christian Schism...," 60.)

> contained, they were at home in a world wider than the provincial cultures of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece or Rome.[80]

Just as the Jews in the Diaspora had come to be valued for their contribution to wider society, so Christians were called to involvement within their host cultures whilst maintaining their nonconformity and sometimes enduring persecution or banishment.[81] But involvement never meant assimilation; in order to make a true contribution, God's people needed to maintain a strong sense of who they were.

> Only a believing community with a "thick" particular identity has something to say to whatever "public" is "out there" to address. And... only the community which welcomes the challenge of public witness can justify (not merely to outsiders but also to its own children) its distinctive existence.[82]

Yoder used his reading of the Jewish Diaspora to converse with Jeffrey Stout's *Ethics after Babel*.[83] The current cultural phenomenon of an absence of univocality, called by Stout "Babel", need pose no great strategic crisis for Christians, since it posed none for the Jews.

> The one thing that would never have occurred to the Jews in Babylon was to try to bridge the distance between their linguistic world and that of their hosts by a foundationalist mental or linguistic move, trying to rise to a higher level or dig to a deeper one, so that the difference could be engulfed in some *tertium quid*, which would convince the Babylonians of moral monotheism without making them Jews, and to which the Jews could yield without sacrificing their local color. They did not look for or seek to construct common ground. Jews knew that there was no larger world than the one their Lord had made and their prophets knew the most about. Its compatibility with the kinds of "wisdom" that the Gentiles could understand seemed to them to validate their holy history rather than than to relativize it. When Hellenism penetrated their world, they did not hesitate to affirm that whatever truth there was in Plato or Aristotle was derived from Moses.[84]

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[80] Yoder, *For the Nations*, 42.
[81] Yoder, "The Jewish Christian Schism...," 141. For a similar view see Walter Brueggemann, "The Scandal and Liberty of Particularity," in *Texts that Linger, Words that Explode: Listening to Prophetic Voices* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 59-72.
[82] Yoder, *For the Nations*, 42. The source of the expression "thick" was not given, but I assume it was taken from Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Hutchinson, 1975), 3-30.
[83] Yoder, *For the Nations*, 71f. He was particularly engaging with Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics after Babel* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1988). See further Yoder, "Meaning after Babble: With Jeffrey Stout beyond Relativism," *JRE* 24/1 (1996), 125-139.
[84] Yoder, *For the Nations*, 73.

Thus the church must maintain its own identity amid the rising culture of postmodernity, knowing that there is no ground recognized by all as neutral upon which claims to universal truth may be established. The identity of the church, socially embodied and maintained by its story (as we shall see), is sufficient to resource its mission, illuminating its declaration of the Gospel, but not attempting to make it irrefutable.

5.3.2 A Universal Order of Social Relations?

In §3.1.1 we saw that Yoder read in Luke's Gospel that Jesus formed a community around himself which embodied a new order of social relations. For all the continuity which Yoder saw between the synagogues and the early church, there was a discontinuity between these two social phenomena. This discontinuity centred around the confession of Jesus as Messiah which meant that he was Lord and was present amid his communities by the presence of the Holy Spirit.[85] They were enabled to be what Israel was called to be yet had repeatedly failed to be.[86] Thus New Testament descriptions of the new community drew on classic Old Testament descriptions of the people of God (e.g., 1 Pet 2:9 drew on Exod 19:6 and Hos 1:6-8).[87] The gifts of the Spirit came upon particular persons with various manifestations, including the exercise of authority in leadership (see chapter 7). But before we deal with that, some other important social characteristics of the conflict-resolving church must be discussed.

If, as we saw in §3.1.1, Jesus' Nazareth Sermon announced his movement towards the Gentiles, the foremost social novelty of the church was the incorporation into the community of Gentiles (1 Pet 2:10; Eph 2:14ff). Anticipating much that has been written by Pauline scholars within the "new perspective,"[88] Yoder wrote,

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[85] Yoder, "The Jewish Christian Schism Revisited," 140.

[86] See Yoder's discussion of discipleship in terms of "participation" and "imitation," the latter being "quite current in the Old Testament" and becoming in the New Testament "a new reality with the gift of the Holy Spirit," in *The Politics of Jesus*, 113-4.

[87] Yoder, *For the Nations*, 39-40.

[88] Charles B. Cousar has summarised the contributions of Krister Stendahl and Marcus Barth in the 1960s, and the pivotal work of E. P. Sanders on Judaism at the turn of the eras in the late 1970s and 1980s, which introduced the "new perspective" on Paul in *The Letters of Paul* (Nashville, Ten.: Abingdon, 1996), 82-86. For discussions of much recent work on Paul, see Tom Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Oxford: Lion, 1997), and Ben Witherington III, *The Paul Quest: The Renewed Search for the Jew of Tarsus* (Downers Grove, Ill. & Leicester: IVP, 1998).

The basic heresy Paul exposed was the failure of those Jewish Christians to recognize that since the Messiah had come the covenant of God had been broken open to include the Gentile. In sum: the fundamental issue was that of the social form of the church. Was it to be a new and inexplicable kind of community of both Jews and Gentiles, or was it going to be a confederation of a Jewish Christian sect and a Gentile one? Or would all the Gentiles have first to become Jews according to the conditions of premessianic proselytism?[89]

This had direct contemporary implications for the church:

> The church must be a sample of the kind of humanity within which, for example, ... racial differences are surmounted. Only then will it have anything to say to the society that surrounds it about how those differences must be dealt with. Otherwise preaching to the world a standard of reconciliation which is not its own experience will be neither honest nor effective. (150)

Richard Hays has recently made much the same point as one of four key issues facing the church today in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament.*[90]

Now Paul not only insisted upon the transcending of Jew/Gentile categories in Christ, but also those of slave/free and male/female (Gal 3:28; cf., 1 Cor 12:13; Col 3:11), yet he dealt with these second and third social novelties in a different way from that of the Jew/Gentile relationship. When Yoder discussed this subject in *The Politics of Jesus* his first concern was to refute the argument that early Christianity had had to borrow its teaching about household relationships from another source than Jesus. So he identified a series of significant differences between Stoic morality and that of the New Testament *Haustafeln* (169-179). He pointed out that the existence of such instructions implied that their recipients must have heard or realised that Christ's liberation reached into every kind of bondage - so that there must already have been expressions of social transformation in the first churches. (173-6) Yet Paul insisted that the way in which this liberation should be expressed must be in accord with their Lord who had effected that radical shift, and this meant not self-assertion but freely chosen self-subordination. Since Paul addressed the subordinate person in the social order as a moral agent (171-2), and also called the dominant partner in the relationship to a kind of subordination in turn

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[89] Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 216. Unattributed page references in this subsection refer to this work.
[90] Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* ((New York/Edinburgh: HarperCollins/T & T Clark, 1996), 441 with reference to 311. Although Hays makes no appeal to Yoder in his chapter on this subject, Yoder is a major influence on his thought; see 253.

(177), Yoder could characterize Paul's instructions about the embodiment of the Gospel in regard to social divisions as "revolutionary subordination"[91] because they "relativize and undercut" the existing order (178). Alongside the concern for subordination in Paul could be discerned a second strand which maximized freedom for slaves and women, particularly in 1 Cor 7 (182).

Yoder acknowledged in the second edition that this chapter of his book had received most criticism (188), and even Richard Hays, who is otherwise favourably disposed towards Yoder's project, thinks that taking these texts as a call for revolutionary subordination "leans towards apologetic wishful thinking."[92] But such a dismissal is too easy. It must be acknowledged that Yoder did not adequately account for the two strands which he identified in Paul's teaching, yet his primary historical argument for the specifically Christian dimension of Paul's position holds good. Yoder could also argue cogently that the liberation of Christ experienced within the church was not imposed violently upon the social order beyond the confines of the church since Jesus had already undermined them (185-7). To be fair to Yoder we must note his insistence that

> I am not affirming a specific biblical ethical content for modern questions; I am rather observing that where the New Testament did offer specific guidance for its own time, that guidance confirmed and applied the messianic ethic of Jesus. (187)

In dealing with contemporary ethical questions there was a need for "broader generalizations, a longer hermeneutical path, and insights from other sources." (187) This was a genuine acknowledgement of a historical trajectory[93] of faithfulness worked out in ever new particulars; a long way from a fundamentalist approach which took no account of history or scriptural diversity. Thus he could acknowledge that "an original vision of

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[91] This was the title of chapter 9 in *The Politics of Jesus*. I will maintain that these social relations are relevant to ecclesiology because the early churches were inseparable from the household, given the household base of those churches (see §7.2.5.).

[92] Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 246.

[93] Yoder used the term "trajectory" (190n60) in common with Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza in *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York/London: Crossroad/SCM, 1983), an approach which he described as parallel to his. He did not acknowledge the gulf between himself and Schüssler Fiorenza here; Mark Thiessen Nation is of the opinion that when Yoder was preparing the second edition of *The Politics of Jesus* he was undergoing the discipline process of the Mennonite Church, and wanted to avoid publishing a more critical response to her feminist position. On trajectory see further §6.1.5.

equality soon came to be modified by less revolutionary interpretations of the Gospel setting in which subordination made sense." (192) He averred that

> The one thing the *Haustafeln* cannot have meant originally is what they have mostly been used for since the second century, namely to reinforce extant authority structures as divinely willed for their own sake, by borrowing propatriarchal arguments either from a Stoic or a Jewish world vision, from an appeal either to creation or to nature. (190)

Support for Yoder's positive view of Paul's stance here has recently come from Methodist New Testament specialist, Ben Witherington. From an extended study of the the household codes he argues that

> While [Paul] begins with the traditional family structure where he finds it, he by no means simply baptizes the existing patriarchal status quo. Instead he works to Christianize all the relationships and eliminate the possibility of abuse. He also, while using traditional terms, redefines notions of headship and submission. All Christians should submit to one another, and serve one another out of reverence for Christ. In other words, it is not simply something a wife should do in relationship to her husband. Paul has eliminated the notion that simple gender determines who should submit. Headship is redefined in the light of the way Christ is head servant of the church. The sacrificial behaviour of Christ, even to the point of dying for the church, sets up the paradigm for the exercise of headship in the Christian family.
>
> What stands out in Paul's household codes is not his use of familiar terms and concepts but the way he modifies those terms and concepts. Given the context in which they were read, the direction in which his modifications tended is as crucial as what he actually says.[94]

Similarly, Paul attempted to reform and modify the existing social structure of slavery, and ameliorate the harm it could do both to the subordinate and superordinate persons in the relationship. So Witherington concludes:

> Paul was not shy about criticizing social structures when it was needful, but since he saw them as part of the form of this world which is passing away, he did not spend most of his time engaged with such matters. Better to emphasize the new creation as it was coming into expression in the Christian community and the Christian household.[95]

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[94] Witherington, *The Paul Quest*, 194. His whole chapter on "Paul the Realist and Radical," which deals with governing authorities, nonviolence, household codes and slavery seems to echo Yoder, to whom he refers on p178n6. For another positive appropriation of Yoder here, see Justin J. Meggitt, "Paul's Social Conservatism," appendix 1 in *Paul, Poverty and Survival* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), 181-188.
[95] Witherington, *The Paul Quest*, 202-3.

5.3.3 Conclusion

How then might the church rightly maintain an open and learning attitude to the Jewish people as well as allowing room for the transforming and liberating work of the Holy Spirit? We have seen that, contrary to Paul's vision, large and influential parts of the Christian church have frequently assumed something close to a supersessionist attitude to Judaism. Whereas Catholic and Magisterial Protestant ecclesiology has tended to take its concepts and structures too much from the Old Testament along with a rejection, indeed persecution, of the Jewish people, Yoder was advocating the reverse; a careful distinguishing between the concepts and structures of the people of God in Old and New Testaments in order to arrive at a properly Christological and pneumatological ecclesiology, together with a much greater openness towards the Jews as God's ancient people.

Yoder's understanding of the relationship between Israel and the church was centred upon Jesus Christ as the fulfilment of the Hebrew Scriptures. There was a real newness in the life and work of Jesus: in fulfilling all that Israel was meant to be and submitting to death for Israel's sins, Jesus reconstructed the people of God on a basis which would leave no future role for the Jerusalem Temple, and inaugurated a worldwide mission to the Gentiles that surpassed the vision of the prophets before him. Yet in another sense the new covenant in his blood stood in continuity with the covenants with Abraham, Moses and David, and the new community which it created stands in continuity with faithful Israel. Thus while the church is built upon Christ and Israel was fulfilled in Christ, the church faces comparable issues of covenant faithfulness as did Israel. This means that the Hebrew Scriptures function not only as prophetic of Christ, but as addressing the church (1 Cor 10, etc.).[96]

If the story of the God's people in the Scriptures begins with Abraham and continues through the faithful community, epitomised by Jesus Christ and continues again through the community of allegiance to him, then the church must model itself on Israel in certain ways, even though certain aspects of Israel's specific identity have been

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[96] See Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1989).

transcended in the widening of God's people to include the Gentiles. Central to the identity of God's people is holiness, a dimension of lifestyle which marks them out from others because of their encounter with a God who is holy. This means that God's people will not conform to what are considered norms or majority practices; they will have different norms, their own practices; they will be considered eccentric because they have recognised an alternative center to that assumed by the majority.

If the Christian church is to accept its Jewish heritage, it must accept its calling to serve as a particular, distinctive, holy people within the wider world, and that this will often mean that it must adopt a minority posture within any particular nation.[97] To reject this minority calling is a rejection of God's particularity, is akin to anti-Judaism. This is not only an intellectual decision, but a moral one, for to ally the church with any particular state is to reject the calling of the church to transcend national and ethnic barriers and to open the door to the worst excesses of church endorsed nationalism. The church is a trans-national community because it is a community of specific allegiance to Jesus Christ. The answer to the danger of arrogance and isolationism of such a posture is not to deny particularity, but to fulfil its calling which is "for the nations." Holiness is both essential to and an imperative for mission.

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[97] See now Philip D. Kenneson, *Beyond Sectarianism: Re-Imagining Church and World* (Harrisburg, Pa.: TPI, 1999).

6. The Tradition of the Community: (2) Its own History

Continuing the broad theme of the tradition of the community, I come now to Yoder's views concerning the history of the church with its many changes in theology and practice. His treatment of tradition opens up his understanding of church history and enables us to consider the other major issue pending from chapter 4: the concept of the fall of the church, linked to what he called "Constantinianism." In the first section I will examine his view of the relationship between the tradition of the community, its Scripture, and the work of God's Spirit within it. This prepares for the second section which examines his work on the history of the church, culminating in a detailed examination of his notion of Constantinianism. Since I will conclude that significant elements of his position have not been refuted, they must still be considered as a prophetic call to the whole church. The third section explores this conclusion, considering his critique of his own Mennonite tradition and his claim to represent classically catholic Christianity.

6.1 The Tradition of the Community: Scripture and Spirit

I begin with Yoder's treatment of the tradition of the church. Only when the importance of tradition and the notion of faithfulness to tradition have been established can we grasp the significance of Yoder's critical view of church history. This is not the place to embark on a full-scale investigation of Yoder's treatment of Scripture, but certain aspects of his approach which relate closely to ecclesiology require discussion. It will become clear that his orientation of Scripture and community not only allowed sufficient place to the work of the Spirit, but could not work without the life-giving Spirit. I shall begin by summarising his general approach to Scripture, referring to an important essay from the

collection entitled, "How to be Read by the Bible."[1] The following subsections will treat key areas in more detail.

Yoder rejected the path of rationalistic orthodoxy with its prior elaboration of a "doctrine of Scripture" as the ground for the Bible's authority. That way depended upon a view of revelation as verbal communication, a collection of words moving from the mind of God through the mind and pen of the author to the mind of the reader. Instead, he found helpful the approach of scholars in the "Biblical realism" school[2] who discovered the Bible saying something with authority as they read and interpreted it. He understood revelation as "the relationship of person to person, the words spoken in the event and recorded after it being limited to a helping function."[3] This did not mean that the words were wrong, but that discussion of their precise meaning as if that were the major dimension of the communication phenomenon took interpreters away from the central issue.

> If, on the other hand, we think of the Bible as testimony clustering around the saving events of human history in which God has called to Himself a people around His Son as their Lord, then we can read these documents without extensive prior discussion of their theoretical uniqueness as words and as a book.[4]

One point which Yoder made in this essay, by reference to a significant group of twentieth century Biblical scholars, was that his own orientation over Biblical interpretation was neither original nor peculiarly Anabaptist.[5]

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[1] Yoder, "The Bible on its own terms" in "How to be Read by the Bible: A Collection of old Essays" (Shalom Desktop Publication, 1995), 81-98.
[2] Only loosely can this be called a school. Yoder cited the following as having some self-consciousness about this approach: Paul Minear, Floyd Filson, G. Ernest Wright, John Bright and John W. Bowman. Others did this kind of work without calling their style a school: Adolf Schlatter, Otto Piper, Oscar Cullmann, Markus Barth, Walther Eichrodt and Gerhard von Rad. (ibid., 84)
[3] Ibid., 93.
[4] Ibid., 95.
[5] It is interesting to note that Walter Brueggemann has recently adopted the category of testimony as key to his *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), see especially 117-122.

6.1.1 The Authority of Tradition

Yoder began his essay with this title[6] by maintaining that there is a difference in authority between Scripture and tradition. Of course, all Scripture readers employ some tradition as a hermeneutical matrix, but this does not mean that the matrix becomes a "source" alongside Scripture. "To recognize that there is no reading of Scripture without an interpreting frame does not set aside the canonical witness as a baseline and a critical instance, or make it only one of "two sources."" (66).[7] Thus the reading of Scripture does not reduce to a hopelessly subjective enterprise, in need of control by a particular agent in the teaching church. On the other hand, it is important to insist that Yoder was not advocating an individualistic reading of Scripture: he clearly argued for biblical interpretation as something which happened within the church community. This "hermeneutics of peoplehood" will be discussed in §6.1.4.

Yoder took pains to employ a scriptural image for the development from Scripture that tradition might embody, rejecting inorganic or conceptual notions such as "unfolding, clarification, or reformulation," and insisting upon organic language such as "growth from seed" or "fecundation." This allowed both greater scope for tradition (the plant grows much larger than the seed, it is not merely the dissection of it) and superior criterial authority to the scriptural source, so that tradition had to be assessed in terms of fidelity to its source. "What is at stake is not whether there can be change but whether there is such a thing as unfaithfulness." (67) This meant that he was able to shift the whole discussion away from an opposition between Scripture and tradition: "The clash is not tradition versus Scripture but faithful tradition versus irresponsible tradition." (69) Next, the organic image was refined:

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[6] Published in *The Priestly Kingdom*, 63-79. Unattributed page references in this subsection are to this essay.

[7] Alister E. McGrath's influential textbook gives the erroneous impression that Anabaptists rejected tradition entirely. His chosen examples are Thomas Müntzer and Caspar Schwenkfeld; see *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 221. However, Müntzer was on the extreme fringe of Anabaptism, and Schwenkfeld was an spiritualist rather than an Anabaptist (see C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora, 1995), 28-39. Yoder stood within the view of ecclesial Anabaptists who created ordered communities, such as the Swiss brethren, the Hutterites and the Dutch after Menno Simons, and his view of tradition would fit within McGrath's category of "single-source theory" (219).

Far from being an ongoing growth like a tree (or a family tree), the wholesome growth of a tradition is like a vine: a story of constant interruption of organic growth in favour of pruning and a new chance for the roots. This renewed appeal to origins is not primitivism, nor an effort to recapture some pristine purity. It is rather a "looping back," a glance over the shoulder to enable a midcourse correction, a rediscovery of something from the past whose pertinence was not seen before, because only a new question or challenge enables us to see it speaking to us.[8] To stay with the vinedresser's image, the effect of pruning is not to harm the vine, but to provoke new growth out of the old wood nearer the ground, to decrease the loss of food and time along the sap's path from roots to fruit, and to make the grapes easier to pick." (69f)

He illustrated this process by the way that new questions concerning social and political aspects of the biblical story had enabled a new "reaching back" in such a way that the texts were ready to speak to them. "It is now possible to talk about the Eucharist as relating to world hunger, or about Jesus as a liberator," (71) whereas earlier scholars had considered such material too particular to be considered authentic religious data.

This concept of tradition was what we should expect, according to Yoder, from several texts that indicated that there would be continuing revelation in the church (Jesus in Jn 14:12-26; 16:7-15 and the pictures of prophecy in Luke and Paul) and provided criteria for it (1 Jn 4:1ff and 1 Cor 12:1ff). If Scripture led its readers to expect new shoots and enjoined the whole church to dress the vine, then the central debate should concern what kind of church could have an open dialogue about justifying any movement beyond Scripture at the bar of Scripture. "So the term "tradition" has exploded beyond the point where it could have functioned as a "second source." It now represents a river in which we all float, or swim, seeking our bearings as we move." (72) Thus the existence of tradition could not be denied or ignored; in fact, the community would expect the ongoing activity of the Spirit feeding a developing tradition. But there might also be resistance to the Spirit and even deceitful influences which would contribute to tradition, and so a means had to be agreed for evaluating tradition, and Scripture had

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[8] The use of the phrase "a glance over the shoulder" constitutes a shift from the botanical image, and this is confirmed by the subsequent move to navigational language ("mid-course correction"). Yoder seemed aware that he had strayed from his original image at the start of the next sentence.

traditionally been the most important voice in such evaluation.[9] Yoder's analysis of tradition was not unlike his work on culture (§3.3.2): the community had to deal with both discriminately.

Yoder concluded his essay by showing how the "just war tradition" had become dominant in Christian ethics, crowding out the earlier pacifist tradition.[10] A change had taken place which could only be described as a reversal of Jesus' rejection of violence, it could not be an organic development of it.

> This case shows that when the issue is whether change has been faithful or unfaithful, then the reason the reformers challenge some usage or idea is not that it is not in the Scriptures, but that it is counter to the Scriptures; not that it is an ancient idea insufficiently validated by ancient texts, but that it is a later introduction invalidated by its contradicting the ancient message... The issue is (as Jesus said it) the traditions of men versus the commandment of God. (76)

This reference to Matt 15:3 anchored Yoder's position with respect to tradition in the teaching of the Lord of the church. The Christian community was obliged to assess its tradition with discrimination because it was warned to do so by the one to whom it owed specific allegiance.

In the end, Yoder's imagery of the vine was transcended by that of the human witness: "The peculiarity of the term "tradition" is that it points to that criterion beyond itself, to which it claims to be a witness. We are therefore doing no violence to the claim of tradition when we test it by fidelity to that origin." (77f) The image of witness for tradition is highly appropriate to the nature of the church, and is coordinate with that of testimony for Scripture. There is a strong emphasis on the significance of witness in the

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[9] Compare the statement of four Methodist dissentients recorded in the *Conversations between the Church of England and the Methodist Church* (London, 1963): "All Churches have traditions, for no body of men can exist long without accumulating them, but they are of mixed value, containing both truth and falsehood, good and evil. They are thus not without use, but must continually be sifted, and tested by scripture. It is true that scripture interprets (and not infrequently condemns) tradition rather than that tradition interprets scripture. In a word tradition points to the worldliness of the church, scripture points to its supernatural origin and basis..." (quoted in F. F. Bruce, *Tradition Old and New* (Exeter, Devon: Paternoster, 1970), 170).
[10] Ambrose and Augustine, facing the new situation of Christendom, bought into a system "whose inherent dynamism they could no longer control... They knew they were borrowing from Cicero." (75f)

Gospel of John and the Book of Acts,[11], as well as occasional use in Paul and the other epistles.

We may conclude that Yoder's understanding of tradition was similar to that of the magisterial Reformers, but it was rather more rigorously applied. This was so because he was prepared to be more critical of the theologians of the Patristic period than is mainstream Christian theology.[12] He perceived the accommodation of the Fathers to aspects of Greek philosophy as a false move, and part of a more general betrayal of Christianity's Jewish heritage (73). But he also perceived that the outward commitment to reform could so easily become a front for resistance to revitalisation. The church was always in need of further reformation, yet, once subservience to political establishment became the priority, the slogan *semper reformanda* became a defence ("nobody's perfect") against change instead of a call to renewal (200 n7).

6.1.2 The Canon of Scripture

There might seem to be a difficulty in Yoder's appeal to the normative status of the New Testament if the finalization of the New Testament canon was not completed until a late period, by which time the church was already fallen according to his view (see §6.2). How can we know that the canon reflects the normative truth by which the church must be judged? How could a fallen church have recognised the normative Scriptures if it was so far removed from their vision as to be described as fallen?

Yoder followed Oscar Cullmann in his understanding of the origin of the canon.[13]

> It is not the case that Scripture lays "from scratch" a foundation, beginning with a *tabula rasa* in either the mind or the society. Scripture is rather constituted as such in the event of its being called upon as critical instance in the controversy over reformation and change. The church is not built on a canon. Canonical

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[11] See the recent *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, edd. I. Howard Marshall & David Peterson (Grand Rapids, Mi. & Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1998).

[12] I do not need to rehearse the standard accounts of the development of the Christian tradition. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* Vol. 1 of The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1971). For another view which is alive to the content of Hellenism which "could endanger the faithfulness of Christianity to its original message," see Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought: vol. 1, From the Beginnings to the Council of Chalcedon* (Nashville, Ten.: Abingdon, 1987²), here 381.

[13] Oscar Cullmann, "The Tradition," *The Early Church*, ed. A. J. B. Higgins (London: SCM, 1956), 59-99.

resources are called upon to illuminate and adjudicate choices among alternative futures in order to be true to the common past. It is then that testimonies from the common past are called upon. Once that is going on, *then* there is need for a second order ruling ("canon" in the technical sense), in order to know which texts to appeal to. The church thus does create the canon, but not in the way that claim was made in the Tridentine argument against the Protestants.... What early councils [*sic*] did in the second and third centuries, by establishing lists of recognized texts ("canon"), was *not* to give authority to those texts but to recognize that those texts already were exercising authority. The churches did that as a way of submitting to the texts, not ruling over them or creating them.[14]

In his long essay "The Authority of the Canon,"[15] Yoder began by mapping the post-Reformation background of the contemporary debate in terms of the positions developed by High Protestant Scholasticism and High Tridentine Catholicism, and then the reaction against them of High Modernism (in each case the use of 'High' indicated the confidence with which claims were made). In contrast, he advanced a less absolutist view of the writings which were later recognised as Scripture: they were the product of a wide pool of authentic memories of Jesus, cast in ways which enabled them to address the ongoing life of the church.

> The development of a selection of writings recognized by churches as authoritative constitutes itself the final proof, delivered by the church itself, that the church does not claim final authority but rather recognizes that it stands under a rule derived from the apostolic age. This "standing under a rule" is not a statement about the event of inspiration or the uniqueness of the authorship of certain texts. It is a statement about the accountability of the Christian community as a movement within history, whose claim to be faithful to historical origins in the midst of historical change obliges it to identify the criteria of that accountability. The affirmation of accountability is not dependent upon one particular definition of how the Scriptures came to be written or selected. (274f)

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[14] Yoder, "How to be Read by the Bible," 65 & 66n3. The councils which established the canon were, of course in the fourth and fifth centuries, so Yoder was probably thinking here of the early *Fathers* of the second and third centuries. Standard works on the canon are Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origins, Development and Significance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) and F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Glasgow: Chapter House, 1988).

[15] Yoder presented this paper in 1977, and it was published in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation: Anabaptist-Mennonite Perspectives*, Text-Reader Series Vol. 1, ed. Willard Swartley (Elkhart, Ind.: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1984), 265-290. Unattributed page references in this subsection are to this essay.

The particular nature of the Christian faith is evident in that it was documented

> not primarily in visions or in speculative theories about divine reality, but in narratives and pastoral letters which claim to be the testimonies to the norming process within an ongoing community. That is how they claim to have been written and that is how we should best take them. Already within the New Testament appeal was made to the founding events. If we are to be continuing the same movement, it will happen not by debating the metaphysical status of the documents but by extending in a compatible way the process of conforming to the foundational events. (275)

This position allowed for the unsystematic nature of the writings and for differences of emphasis or theological expression among them. It also specified how the text was to be taken in the contemporary church, something which the doctrine of inspiration did not address. Further, it meant that

> Interpretations which would prescribe a timelessly binding moral social order without reference to the in-breaking of the messianic age, or to the inter-cultural missionary dynamics of the church (such as the apostolic instructions about the place of women) will be less credible. Interpretations purporting to find some timelessly normative scheme of salvation experience, or of divine metaphysics, in detachment from the norming work of Jesus in the missionary church will also be less credible, whereas in the earlier High Protestant Scholastic tradition their very timelessness would have been considered an argument in their favour. (277)

This was a significant recognition of the time- and culture-bound nature of the early churches, and of the impossibility of supposing that contemporary churches could replicate every detail of their attempts to be faithful to their Lord in their own particular point in history (see §6.1.5).

Yoder understood the Holy Spirit as having a hand in the process of the effort of the church to conform to the normative work of Jesus. "So what we are guided by is not simply the text as it stands, but the Spirit-led experience which produced the text, including the Spirit mandated adaptations of the original message to the later readership for whom the later author was writing." (283) This helps to understand how there came to be a concept of a teaching authority beyond that of the Scripture itself. But he rejected the High Protestant Scholastic view that "the process of canon fixation was itself a unique and final intervention of God, the one act of inspiration which occurred after the

writing of the texts.... That was an effort to remove canonization from the relativity of the historical process." (287) It was understandable that the community of later years should select from its library (so to speak) those witnesses of the story of Jesus which were perceived most adequately to serve the norming purpose. But later Christian thinkers

> felt free to cite texts which were not in the canon as having some kind of historically rooted authority. Thus the notion of canonical status should never have been associated with a claim that only these texts are to be read with profit, or that only they throw light on Jesus. The fact that a canon is present and contributes to the definition of the faithful identity of Christian community is separate both in logic and in actual historical fact from the details of determining which texts belong in that canon. (288)[16]

Thus to return to the opening question of this section, Yoder might reply that the substantial bulk of what we know as the New Testament writings was becoming formally recognised for its norming capacity by the end of the second century as a result of debates with Marcion and Gnostic groups, although it would have already begun to have that function from the time of the crisis of Jerusalem's destruction in 70 C.E..[17] The reference to Paul's letters in 2 Pet 3:15-6 indicates that at least some of these were known collectively and regarded as Scripture in the late first century.[18] Once established in this capacity, even subsequent changes in the status of the church in relation to the empire, which rendered problematic the hermeneutics of a good proportion of these texts, would not have been able to displace them. The recent history of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa teaches us that it is possible for a national church to subscribe to the authority of the scriptural canon whilst endorsing a blasphemous national constitution.[19]

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[16] He could also say that "if a document were to be discovered which could be authenticated as coming from the early church "we would have to receive it with great seriousness."" (278) I note that Yoder used the vine image, referred to above (6.1.1), in this essay, 289f.

[17] Appeal can be made to James Sanders' work on identity crisis as crucial to canon formation as described in §5.2.4.2 above. See also "Adaptable for Life: The Nature and Function of Canon," *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 9-39.

[18] See Richard J. Baukham, *Jude, 2 Peter* WBC (Waco, Texas: Word, 1983), 330f and 157-8 on date; F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 120.

[19] For one discussion of this issue, see John W. de Gruchy, "Theologies in conflict: the South African debate," in *Resistance and Hope:South African Essays in Honour of Beyers Naudé* edd. Charles Villa-Vicencio & John W. de Gruchy (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1985), 85-97. The classic declaration was, of course, the *Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church - A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa* (Exeter, Devon: Paternoster, 1986).

Thus the strength of tradition may guarantee formal adoption even while the implications of that tradition are neglected, as Jeremiah once warned (Jer 7:1-15). Despite all this, since the medieval church continued to subscribe to these texts, potential for its recovery was preserved within it despite the introduction of hermeneutical distortions necessitated by its becoming the state church.

6.1.3 The Baseline within Scripture

There was no doubt in Yoder's mind that the notion of the canon had to be supplemented with a theological touchstone. That measure was "not first a set of propositions, but the historical impact of Jesus."[20] He could formulate this is a various ways; e.g.,

> For the radical Protestant there will always be a canon within the canon: namely, that recorded experience of practical moral reasoning in genuine human form that bears the name of Jesus... If Jesus Christ is Lord, obedience to his rule cannot be dysfunctional.[21]

He acknowledged the formal issue raised by the impossibility of establishing an indubitable historical picture of Jesus,[22] but he was content to work with the canonical texts as witness to Jesus.

Yoder argued that there were many aspects of Jesus' life and ministry to which appeals had been made as examples of how Christians should conduct themselves, but that only in one realm did the concept of imitation hold: "the concrete social meaning of the cross in its relation to enmity and power."[23] He discussed the concept of correspondence between the believer's behaviour and that of his Lord in terms of discipleship and imitation, terms which overlapped in three areas: the love of God, the life of Christ and the death of Christ. These he established by apostolic teaching from the epistles together with Jesus' direct instruction to his disciples in the Gospels. He insisted that the apostolic ethic was centred upon the disciple's cross and evidenced "a substantial, binding, costly social stance."[24] In contrast he maintained that there was no

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[20] "How to be Read by the Bible," 44.
[21] Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 37.
[22] See the discussions in *The Politics of Jesus*, 13-20, 54-5.
[23] Ibid., 131.
[24] Ibid., 127.

general concept of living like Jesus in such terms as his forsaking domicile and property, his celibacy or his barefoot itinerancy. He pointed to several instances of apostolic teaching in which no appeal to the example of Jesus was made where there might have been (e.g., the issue of celibacy, 1 Cor 7; earning one's own living, 1 Cor 9).

This observation was an argument from silence which strengthened his case for the priority of the costly social stance, but did not establish the case against other ways in which the church might derive patterns from the Gospels. My concern here is that Yoder rejected claims to a model pastoral method based on Jesus' formation of a small circle of disciples, since it was not mentioned as such in the New Testament.[25] Yet earlier in the same book he had argued that Jesus' choice of twelve disciples had been socially significant,[26] and he did insist on the normativity of social patterns found in Scripture, as we shall see in $6.2.2.: "the shape of the people of God does matter. Medium and message cannot be divorced."[27]

It could be argued that "a model pastoral method" is not quite the same as "social shape," but I think there is a tension in Yoder's thought here. The strength of his argument for the imitation of the concrete social meaning of the cross in its relation to enmity and power was that it relied upon explicit commands in the gospels and epistles. But this does not prohibit the drawing of conclusions concerning the social shape of the gospel and people of God from the Gospels.[28] I conclude that Yoder's ecclesiological formulation should be given equal weight. Of course, the choice of twelve disciples had a particular social significance within first-century Judaism, and so any application to the particular social shape of the church in twentieth century Britain (say) must take cultural change into account.

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[25] Ibid., 131.
[26] Ibid., 33 as quoted in $3.1.1.
[27] Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Nashville, Ten.: Discipleship Resources, 1992), 10.
[28] I have argued that the way in which the Jesus of the Gospels treated people, spoke to them, and even the settings or locations in which he spoke to them, all pointed to a particular revelation of a God who was not confined to conventional religious communication, and that this has ecclesiological implications in two publications: *Preaching as Dialogue: Is the Sermon a Sacred Cow?* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 1996), and "Interactive Preaching" in *Anabaptism Today*, 20 (Spring 1999), 14-21.

Having observed this minor inconsistency, I must return to Yoder's central Christological hermeneutic. This is the classic Anabaptist position and derives from a high Christology. Its most obvious application is in Christian appropriation of the Old Testament. I have found that Francis Watson, coming from a different perspective, has provided a succinct formulation along similar lines: "*the Old Testament comes to us with Jesus and from Jesus, and can never be understood in abstraction from him.*"[29]

6.1.4 The Hermeneutics of the Community

How does the community discover what the Spirit is saying in its particular location? How does Scripture function in this process of discovery? These are the sort of questions which Yoder addressed in another key essay, "The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood."[30] His focus was the issue of practical moral reasoning, yet Christian ethics for Yoder was intimately connected with the life of the church, and it will become evident how this subject illuminated his ecclesiology.

He began by discussing the unity behind the diversity within Protestantism and then defined "the criterion of Protestant identity in the course of its use, in the perennially unfinished process of critiquing the developed tradition from the perspective of its own roots." (16) This critical principle of appeal to the sources reached farther than could have been dreamed of by those who first called themselves "Protestant."

> If there is to be a fundamental skepticism about what everybody everywhere always thought, we shall expect it to include an element of challenge concerning who was doing the thinking before. That theology should only be taught by theologians, that catechesis and confession must be reserved to the duly ordained, and that decisions about the exercise of power need primarily to be made by the people who legitimately hold that power, are elements of the previously prevailing moral wisdom which it is not merely permissible but imperative to doubt. This doubt is expressed classically in the New Testament, which says that all of God's people should be kings, or priests, or prophets, or charismatics. Any reservation of the responsibility for moral discernment to a specialist must be challenged, especially if that specialist is understood to hold authority partly because he is one of a category of persons separated from the life-situations of people making moral choices. (17)

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[29] Francis Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 182.
[30] Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 15-45. Unattributed page references in this subsection are to this essay.

In the early 1520s both Luther and Zwingli had argued for the working of the Spirit in the congregation, appealing to 1 Corinthians 14. This was useful to them while they needed to justify their independence over against the bishops or the Holy Roman empire, but ceased to be attractive once they felt the need for support from local civil authorities. The politicization of mainstream Protestantism had the opposite effect of the slogan *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*, and it was left to the radical Reformers to maintain the call for change. Behind this congregationalism Yoder identified a perception of "the corporate dimension of human nature" (24), yet once the communal quality of belief was pre-empted by the sociology of the establishment, the only social form that came to mind with which to critique it was the lonely rebel. And so Catholicism could later accuse Protestantism of being incorrigibly individualistic, and the Enlightenment could turn this into a compliment later still.

> It is the testimony of radical Protestantism that there does exist a third option, which is not merely a mixture of elements of the other two. Communities which are genuinely voluntary can affirm individual dignity (at the point of the uncoerced adherence of the member) without enshrining individualism. They can likewise realize community without authorizing lordship or establishment. (24)[31]

In Yoder's contemporary situation, the equivalent of the establishment was provided less by governmental sanction than by the conformity produced by schools, the job market and the media. Over against that new kind of establishment stood the voluntary church which took seriously the rule of Christ,[32] providing an alternative to both individualistic intuitionism and completely objective rigidity.

He then set out how this community worked, guided by the Pauline insistence that every member of the body had a distinctive place in the process, and describing only the functions which had the most bearing on practical moral reasoning. The community would have agents of direction, prophets who were allowed space to speak and whose discourse was "weighed" (1 Cor 14:29). The community would be aided by agents of memory, scribes who brought out of the storeroom of community memory selected,

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[31] See further §3.2.1.
[32] Based on Matt 18:15-20; see above, §4.1.1.

appropriate treasures (Matt 13:52), so that the community might make suitably informed decisions. The community would be guided by agents of linguistic self-consciousness (like Priscilla, Acts 18:26), teachers who were able to identify the substantive issues at hand and who maintained the balance between retaining "the pattern of sound words" and avoiding "disputing about words" (2 Tim 1:13, 2:16). The community would be guided by agents of order and due process (overseers, elders or shepherds, like James in Acts 15:13) who ensured that genuine consensus was reached. (28-34) The community which made decisions like this

> pulls back... from any claim to catholic generalizability and infallibility, yet it is believingly, modestly ready to say of consensus reached today, "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us," and to commend this insight by encyclical to other churches. (35)

There is no doubt that Yoder's view of the actual working of the community through the participation of each member involved a highly active Holy Spirit (45). He followed the Anabaptists in placing theological authority in the hands of the congregation such that it could not be bound by tradition, creed or government authority, while also rejecting all kinds of visionary enthusiasm and libertinism.[33]

6.1.5 Trajectory through History

If Yoder's claim to take history seriously were to hold, how could the faithful community hear the voice of the Spirit addressing the novel situations it faced through its reading of the Scriptures which often addressed a very different cultural situation? Yoder realized that the Bible itself provided no changeless charter for the church or wider society.

> It is rather the case that Scriptures are appealed to as a critical instance in the controversies about reformation and change. The church is not built upon a canon. Scripture comes into being with status as "canon" in midstream, as a believing community needs to illuminate and adjudicate choices among alternative futures in order to be true to the common past. It is then that the Scriptures are called upon; only when they are thus called upon does a second order ruling become necessary ("canon" in the narrower sense) as to which

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[33] Yoder, "The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation: Anabaptist-Mennonite Perspectives*, ed. Swartley, 11-28, here 21-23.

> witnesses we agree we can all appeal to. The creation of "Scripture" is thus a critical event and not a conservative phenomenon.[34]

Since Scripture was not a systematized compendium of final answers so much as a repertory of more or less pertinent paradigms, no one expert could monopolise the task of selecting and transculturally transforming those paradigms in ever new settings. Instead it had to be carried out by "the entire believing community, joining complementarily those who are most authentically part of the local setting with those who best represent the worldwide community and the canonical memories."[35]

One word which sums up Yoder's recognition of the importance of historical distance between the time of the Scriptures and that of the contemporary church is "trajectory."[36] Yoder did not often use this word, yet the imagery is evident in a number of places. So commenting on Paul's instructions to slaves in 1 Cor 7, he observed an underlying concern "to move away from rather than towards freedom."[37] This trajectory could be projected from within the Scriptures, for "we understand God's purposes to be working themselves out through history so that a meaningful movement from the Old Testament to the New can be a fundamental part of God's plan."[38] Thus his most significant usage of the term was in his refusal that "any post-apostolic trajectory be permitted to leave the Bible behind as a launching pad, from which, once in orbit, the spaceship church no longer needs to get its signals."[39]

With this observation of the significance of trajectory through history, I must close my account of Yoder's treatment of the use of Scripture within the community and its relation to tradition. His was a carefully worked out hermeneutic which sought to hear the voice of God's Spirit through the community as it read the Scripture alongside its contemporary situation, taking full account of historical particularity.

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[34] Yoder, *For the Nations* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1997), 90-91.
[35] Ibid., 92f.
[36] As noted in §5.3.2. The term was made influential in New Testament studies by James M. Robinson & Helmut Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).
[37] Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 182.
[38] Yoder, "The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists," 27.
[39] Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood*, 311.

6.2 The History of the Church: Evaluating the Tradition

I am now in a position to consider Yoder's evaluation of the tradition as expressed in church history. Perhaps the most significant question to be posed here is that of realism: did he advocate an impossible ideal for the church, or have the various strands of Christian tradition tended to obscure what the church realistically could be in terms of faithfulness to its Lord, given the reality of the Holy Spirit? The subsections that follow set out the steps in Yoder's argument, engaging with several criticisms that have been made along the way.

6.2.1 Primitivism versus Normative Origins

The appeal to original Christianity during the Reformation was termed "primitivism" by Roland Bainton[40], and the study of "primitivism" has recently become a significant interest for a number of American scholars, chief among them, Richard Hughes. Hughes reports that many of the scholars studying the subject agree "that one central theme threads its way through all primitivist movements: a rejection of any sense of history." He divides Christian believers into two camps: those restorationists who attempt "to recover some important belief or practice from the time of pure beginnings," subsequently lost; and those

> who do not view the founding age as more normative than other periods in Christian history, or who think the founding age is important but self-consciously interpret its meaning in the light of later events and developments. Put another way, restorationists seek to apprehend some particular dimension of the founding age, unmediated through subsequent understandings.[41]

Yoder was already alive to the charge of primitivism in 1984,[42] and his broad response to it could be expressed as follows: "It is neither possible nor necessarily desirable to reproduce in detail specific social structures of another age."[43] In his article

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[40] "Changing Ideas and Ideals in the Sixteenth Century," *The Journal of Modern History* 8 (1936), 428.
[41] From his Preface to *The Primitive Church in the Modern World* ed. Richard T. Hughes (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), x, xi.
[42] In *The Priestly Kingdom* (205f n8) he noted that the term was current in the work of Arthur Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*, (Baltimore, 1935).
[43] Yoder, *The Fullness of Christ: Paul's Vision of Universal Ministry* (Elgin, Ill.: Brethren Press, 1987), 86.

published in Hughes' 1995 collection, Yoder exposed many of the weaknesses of the primitivism project, especially the imprecision of the term itself. He provided a brief overview of how mainstream "catholic" theology changed over the centuries, emphasizing the variety of visions of renewal that emerged along the way. He acknowledged the significance of "historical consciousness" (though it, too, was an ill-defined concept) which "teaches us that there is no univocal interpretation of fidelity to ancient models," while noting that such a consciousness was not available to any sixteenth-century figure. Although some dismissed "historical consciousness" as a product of the unbelieving enlightenment, those were wiser for whom

> the ability to relativize one's own identity-giving recent and local past, in the interest of a longer history and wider world, is a part of a Christian missionary cosmology and a most congruent extrapolation of the appeal to Abraham and Jesus as leverage points against apostasy. It may preserve us from absolutizing our present as well as free us to honour other epochs than our own. Then "modernity" is a child and ally of "restitution," not its enemy. Modernity in this sense is the enemy of that mode of establishment that claims to be self-evidently "catholic," rather than the enemy of the critical historical appeal.[44]

Thus Yoder recognised a certain value in the modern critical historical project, but this does not mean that he bought into historicism[45] as such, since he maintained the normative role of the Scriptures over theoretical constructs.

He went on to draw attention to the paradox between the key role of Paul in the New Testament and his marginal influence in the churches of the first half of the second century, and observed that

> origins only take on their definition and their authority later, when they are appealed to in order to throw light on conflicting definitions of present faithfulness. This kind of appeal began on one level in the origins of the gospel as literature, on another in the gathering of the New Testament as corpus, and on yet another in the origins of church history. The fact that the textual baseline to which the later argument appeals was not there at the outset, but is the product of the appeal, does not make the "myth" [of Christian origins] false; that is the only way it could have come to be. That fact does not accredit as somehow more true, or true on other grounds, truth claims that avoid

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[44] Yoder, "Primitivism in the Radical Reformation: Strengths and Weakness" in Richard T. Hughes (ed.), *The Primitive Church in the Modern World* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 74-97, here 86.

[45] For a brief discussion of historicism with bibliography, see Robert Morgan's article in *DBI*, 290-1.

> vulnerability in the arena of history. The paradox is that we need the canon, with Paul at its heart, *not* because the witness of Paul was at the heart of the life of all the churches of the first century, but because it was not. The "golden age" metaphor turns out to be the opposite of how the canonical appeal works.[46]

The reason for the appeal to origins is precisely that there are several contesting normative claims, all of them within historical experience.

Yoder understood the first or "normative" state of the church not as a golden age of Eden-like simplicity or sinlessness, but one in which certain patterns of community belief and behaviour were taught or upheld as expressive of the gospel, even if they were not always attained by all adherents.[47] I would maintain that even a superficial reading of the New Testament epistles shows that the early churches were far from perfect in the judgement of the authors. These Christian leaders stood in the scriptural tradition of the prophets (of which Jesus was quintessential)[48] who were continually having to recall God's people to the distinctive life which they professed, but frequently denied in practice. This distinctive life was expressed not simply in personal holiness, but in the quality of relationships within the church, with all their attitudinal and socio-economic dimensions. Paul, James and the others were often vehemently critical of their intended readers because they sought to maintain this norm of specific identity. In this they were not unrealistic: they recognised that there would be failures and relationship breakdowns, and they taught how the resources of Christ enabled restoration. Of course, their expectations can only be described as realistic given their belief in the power of the Holy Spirit. But they would not tolerate a settling back of the church into conventional mediocracy (or worse) according to the standards of this world.

It is interesting to compare this position with that of Ernst Troeltsch who believed that his "church type" of Christianity (as opposed to "sect type") was likely to endure as the basic form of Christianity "since it is able to receive the masses and to adjust itself to the world, because to a certain extent it can afford to ignore the need for personal holiness for the sake of the objective treasures of grace and redemption." Troeltsch

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[46] Yoder, "Primitivism in the Radical Reformation," 89.
[47] Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 124.
[48] On Jesus as a prophet, see now N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996).

admitted "that this does mean a modification of Christian thought in order to bring it down to the average level, the level of practical possibility; and it is a principle of far reaching adjustment and compromise."[49] This extraordinary admission amounts to a virtual concession of spiritual death within "church type" Christianity for it concedes not only a modification of Christian thought, but involves a denial of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Describing "the treasures of grace and redemption" as "objective" makes them more theoretical than vital; in truth, they are made available within the church only through the work of the Spirit. But if the Spirit so enlivens the church, why should "personal holiness" be any less "objective" than the treasures of grace and redemption? It is inseparable from grace and redemption!

The primitivism project cannot justly interpret Christian belief and practice because it fails to reckon with the role of tradition in the integrity of a community, and which intrinsically involves some notion of criteria regarding authenticity of tradition.[50] It is within this stance that Yoder must be placed, and while some in the Anabaptist tradition might deny the importance of history he, by emphasising history's contingent character, took it extremely seriously as we have seen (§5.1.1 and §6.1.5), and will see below.

6.2.2 History and the "Fall" of the Church

Not only did Yoder believe that Christianity's original vision, as found in the Scriptures, was normative, but he maintained that mainstream Christianity had so compromised that vision that by the end of the fourth century it could be described as fallen.[51] For a number of historical and semantic reasons he characterized the programme of critique of the mainstream tradition and recovery of a Christianity true to its origins, as attempted by

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[49] Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, trans. Olive Wyon (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1931), Vol. 2, 993.
[50] Such a position has been powerfully advocated by Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1985²).
[51] The key essay on this subject is "Anabaptism and History" in *The Priestly Kingdom* (1984), 123-134. Unattributed page references in this subsection are to this essay.

Anabaptists and others, as "restitutionalism." He employed this term in relation to a pattern within history which had three movements:

> There was once a normative state of the church. Then there was a "Fall," leaving a degenerate state, so intrinsically deteriorated as not to be reparable without discontinuity. Then there is the radical renewal. (124)

In this subsection I will examine the concept of a fall of the church, and consider the proposal of Constantinianism as a particular historical instance of a fall in the next.

Yoder recounted how Luther, Melanchthon and Zwingli learned from Erasmus to criticise the superstition and intolerance of the church of Rome by appeal to the example of the early church. However, they soon had this weapon turned against themselves by the Anabaptists who could argue that the New Testament provided no warrant for infant baptism or the union of church and state. Thus the magisterial Reformers found it necessary to redefine the concept of the fall of the church: the form of the church was unimportant, what mattered was its message or doctrine. So they welcomed the fusion of church and world in *corpus christianum* as a step forward under Providence, beyond the apostolic age.[52] In order to discriminate between the visions of the official Reformers and those of the Anabaptists, Yoder stipulated that restitutionism must

> a) include an alternative to the social shape of the fallen Christendom it rejects, not only to doctrinal formulations or churchly practices. It must further b) identify *within* Scripture its baseline, especially in regard to the relationship of the Testaments; and it must c) locate the authority to read scripture somewhere (the prophet, the congregation, everyman) outside the establishment. (126)

I have already shown how he produced these stipulations in some detail: (a) in §4.1, and (b) in §6.1.

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[52] In the sixteenth century many others were looking for a restoration of authentic Christianity, yet since they maintained a union of state politics and religion, they effectively pursued a model derived from the Davidic Kingdom. The achievement of this goal would have meant not a return to the New Testament vision so much as the inauguration of a new era in world history. Here Yoder mentioned Melchior Hoffman, Hans Hut (perhaps), and Thomas Müntzer, while the leaders of the rebellion at Münster saw their movement going even further. However, "the ecclesial Anabaptists stood with majority Protestantism (and some Catholics) in ascribing to the Incarnation a normative significance such that we do not hope to go past Christ either backward (to David or Adam) or forward (to a new unaccountable "Spirit" or kingdom). (125)

A common response to the sort of restitutionalism which Yoder proposed has been to maintain that it constitutes a denial of history. In response to this charge, he made a number of points. Firstly,

> By standing in judgement on particular fruits of historical development such as the state/church linkage, episcopacy, and pedobaptism, restitutionism accepts the challenge to be critical of history and thereby take it more seriously than do those for whom some other criterion than the New Testament determines the faithfulness of the church. (127)[53]

Secondly, restitutionalism affirmed the character of human beings as making decisions which constitute history.

> The radical reformers read their Bible because they took their own time seriously as one more *kairos* of choice between fall and renewal. A picture of past and present as made up of crucial particular choices, on each of which the future depends, is far more earnest than one in which an indefectible church and a pious government have things so in hand that only natural catastrophe and the exotic infidel are to be feared. (128)

Thirdly, the restitutionists took history seriously also in that their norm "was not a timeless garden of Eden ... [nor] the New Jerusalem," but the very particular story of the New Testament. (129)

Those who charged restitutionalism with a rejection of history could only do so by first assuming that the actual course of history was inevitable or was always chosen correctly.[54] A truly Christian view of history must allow Christ to provide a critique of historical developments. Indeed Yoder asserted pointedly, "only the mental structure of restitutionalism can be at once Christian and serious about history." (130)[55] Even more strongly: "It is not the free church but the establishment model that attempts to freeze history in the claim thereby to be taking responsibility for it." (200 n7)

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[53] Yoder illustrated this by citing the attempt of the Anabaptists to investigate and reconstruct the origins of pedobaptism, something that Catholics or Oecolampadius felt no need to do.

[54] See section 5.1.1 "It did not have to be".

[55] For early Christian attitudes to history see L. G. Patterson's helpful survey, *God and History in Early Christian Thought: A Study of Themes from Justin Martyr to Gregory the Great* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1967), who points out that Augustine notably failed to speak to the central issue over which Christians and pagans divided in their interpretation of the fall of Rome: "He does not really deny the operation of a special providence so much as he avoids it." (124)

Yoder sought to answer two possible objections. Firstly, was not restitutionalism inherently schismatic? Here his defence was that

> Since unity was itself one of the characteristics of the New Testament church [in terms of its vision, if not always its practice], restitutionism cannot be schismatic in principle, but only when forces beyond its control make valid unity in renewal unattainable. (126)

As usual Yoder refused to accept the premises from which the objection was launched. Secondly, did not the New Testament evidence indicate that there was some variety of church organisation from the earliest times? Here he could concede the point, but maintained that the Anabaptists were less precise about a normative church polity than was Calvin who claimed to have found in the New Testament a specific pattern of "fourfold ministry," eldership and synod (131).

In the previous subsection I appealed to the scriptural tradition of the prophets, and this may help to evaluate Yoder's notion of a "fall" of the church. In the story of God's people known to us in Scripture there are many episodes of failure and breakdown in the community, and they can be grouped into three phases each issuing in a radical discontinuity which could be described as a "fall". The first began almost immediately after the establishment of the covenant at Mount Sinai with the incident of the Golden Calf, and it was echoed in the many subsequent wilderness rebellions. In many ways these function as echoes of the "fall" of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, since Israel in the books of Exodus and Numbers is called to a recapitulation of the original creation.[56] The second "fall" was the longer term breaking of the covenant within the land which eventually led to the destruction of Jerusalem with its temple and the Babylonian exile. In Jeremiah 11:10 this covenant breaking was likened to the apostasy of Israel's ancestors.[57] The third "fall" was the rejection and crucifixion of the Jewish Messiah with its inevitable consequence, the second destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. N. T. Wright emphasises the similarities between these second and third "falls":

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[56] See particularly William P. Brown, *The Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 205-228. Approaching his conclusion, Brown says significantly, "Israel is called on to embody the garden" and refers to Malachi's prophecy to this effect (3:12). "In short, the possibility of the garden is not an unattainable ideal for the Yahwist." (225, 226)

[57] A similar parallel is drawn in Ezek 20:36f.

> The story of judgement and vindication which Jesus told is very much like the story told by the prophet Jeremiah, invoking the categories of cosmic disaster in order to invest the coming socio-political disaster with its full theological significance.[58]

In the first of these "falls" God only refrained from utterly destroying the people in gracious response to Moses' repeated intercessions, and, even so, limited judgement was visited upon them and filled the future with foreboding; "Nevertheless, when the day comes for punishment, I will punish them for their sin." (Exod 32:34). In the second and third cases, the distinctiveness of God's chosen people (in terms of covenant loyalty to YHWH expressed in a lifestyle reflective of YHWH's character and responsive to him) had become so eroded as to precipitate thorough judgement on the old expression of God's people (Israel as a political state, Israel as an ethnic nation), but also the emergence of a new expression of God's people (Israel as a faith community, the church as a trans-ethnic faith community). Significant shifts in the process of erosion of distinctiveness might be discerned in each case (the introduction of the monarchy, the accommodation of priestly leadership to colonial powers).

Thus an equivalent "fall" of the church would be perceived in a further eclipse of the distinctiveness of God's people. This might not precipitate God's judgement in the form of obvious public destruction precisely because God's people no longer took a national or ethnic form. But the key point to be made about the category of a "fall" being applied to the history of the church is that it would manifest itself not in an alteration of a creed (a theoretical apostasy), but in a much wider breakdown in its specific allegiance to Jesus as its Lord. We have seen how Yoder's definition of the Christian community in terms of its specific allegiance had a sociological embodiment: it involved specific practices which expressed the particular identity of the community, not least the maintenance of a clear boundary. So a major shift in the identity of the community would constitute a "fall".

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[58] On the link between the rejection of Jesus and the fall of Jerusalem, see N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, chapter 8, here 323.

If Jerusalem could so fall as to be judged by God and be subjected to destruction,[59] and if in the New Testament we find warnings of judgement on the church (1 Pet 4:17; Jude 5ff) and the threat of spiritual death aimed at churches in particular localities (Rev 2:5; 3:2-3, 16), why should it be strange that significant parts of the Christian church might be said to have fallen? I hope that it will be clear that in each of the cases of a "fall" that I have discussed, there continued to survive faithful elements as well as the promise of future restoration. In other words, "fall" does not imply utter divine rejection.

6.2.3 The Ecclesiological Critique of Constantinianism

The Reformers generally regarded the church as fallen from its original condition as presented in the New Testament. But there were differences as to when this fall occurred: Luther associated it with Sabianus and Boniface III, Calvin with Gregory the Great, and Zwingli with Hildebrand.[60] All these believed that the old church needed to be purged of various errors and abuses, especially papal authority, yet they felt a degree of continuity with it as an institution even after their own churches had been established. The "fall" of the church had never been complete. However, the Anabaptists held that the primitive church of the apostles had lost its purity and ceased to be the church once church and state were united, a process set in motion under Constantine and institutionalized under Theodosius and his successors. Once infant baptism became the norm throughout the empire, and force could be used to compel conformity to the state church, the character of the church as a voluntary fellowship of the regenerate had been fundamentally jettisoned: a profound shift had occurred in church/world relations.[61]

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[59] On this, see Peter W. L. Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City: New Testament Perspectives on Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids, Mi. & Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1996), who writes (316), "the story of Jerusalem becomes a pointed paradigm to all generations of the important principle that God's good gifts can be turned against him, that divine promises can be twisted by human pride and presumption, and that arenas of past blessing from God can become centres of human rebellion against him. The 'city of God' could turn against him. Jerusalem, yes even Jerusalem, could become not so distinct from a Babylon (Rev 11:8; 14:6)."

[60] William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story: An Introduction to Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1996³), 241.

[61] Ibid., 241-3.

Yoder was frequently critical of what he called Constantinianism.[62] For instance, he wrote

> the fundamental structural definition of the Free Church stance is its rejection of the Constantinian synthesis, the acceptance of which has been (classically, whatever recent changes they have accepted) common to all other traditions, Protestant and Catholic. By "Constantinian synthesis" we refer naturally not to the Emperor himself but to the radical reorganization of church-society relationships which took place in his century, so that henceforth the assumption became normative that sovereign and people were Christian.[63]

By the fifth century, the leaders of the "great" church had lost the cutting edge of the original specific community ethic, though Yoder identified the root of this failure in a number of factors, particularly estrangement from Judaism in the second century.

A critique of the notion of Constantinianism has come from Daniel Williams,[64] who cites Yoder among others as having implicated the doctrinal development of the fourth century in this departure. He sets out to test the Free Church paradigm of the "fall" of Catholicism by examining the primary sources in some detail, particularly from the fourth and early fifth centuries. He helpfully shows that the process of assimilation of Nicene theology in the church was quite slow, only gradually displacing local creeds and doctrinal formulae (125f). This means that he can demonstrate the inadequacy of some in the Free Churches who have developed an ecclesiastical-political theory (unduly influenced by Eusebius) of 'one Church, one empire, one faith' in order to criticise it (125-6). His conclusion is similar to Reimer's (§2.3.2) in its dismissal of an exaggerated construct: "We can discover little to underwrite the notion that post-Constantinian, Nicene 'orthodoxy' is best understood as a functional part of imperial polity and therefore a drastic departure from the Christianity of earlier centuries." (130) Williams seems to have overlooked the fact that the writings

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[62] See in particular, "Radical Reformation Ethics in Ecumenical Perspective," "Anabaptism and History,""The Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics," all published in *The Priestly Kingdom*; "Christ the Hope of the World," "The Disavowal of Constantine" published in *The Royal Priesthood.*

[63] Yoder, "Church and State According to a Free Church Tradition," in *On Earth Peace*, ed. Donald Durnbaugh. (Elgin, Ill.; The Brethren Press, 1978), 279-288, here 280.

[64] Daniel H. Williams, "Constantine, Nicea and the 'fall' of the Church," in *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric and Community*, edd. Lewis Ayres & Gareth Jones (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), 117-136. Unattributed page references in this and the following two paragraphs are to this article.

of Arius were burned on the recommendation of the council of Nicea, as were those of the majority of "heretics."[65]

Williams has so shaped his focus upon the gradual impact of this creed as to obscure the much more significant ecclesiological issues in the rapprochement between church and state instigated by Constantine which have meant so much in Free Church thinking, let alone in Yoder's.[66] The point at issue can be clarified in socio-theological terms. By the early medieval period, the community's boundary marker (baptism) had been transformed into a rite expected of most of society (though retaining the liturgy of a faith community), so that the identity of the community had been confused. For those who wanted to become disciples (and many did) it became necessary to redraw the boundary around a new level of membership, and thus developed the significance of the clergy, and of the religious order. Then the church, so redefined sociologically, had allowed itself to be reconceptualized as the religion of the Roman Empire; it had fallen from its calling, not simply in the sense of participating in the weakness and fallibility of all that is mortal, but in a deeper sense of resocialising itself so as to nominalize (and thus marginalize) its members' specific allegiance to its Lord. Of course, since the church was defined at the time without any significant sociological dimension - in terms of apostolic succession - then the transformation of baptism by making it a rite expected of most of society was hardly noticed.

Williams' essay can be understood as part of a wider project to argue for a renewed appreciation for the tradition among members of the Free Churches and Evagelicals.[67] Whilst I have some sympathy for his general concerns, his approach contains no means

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[65] A point made by Eduardo Hoornaert, "The Nicene Creed and the Unity of Christians," in *Faith to Creed: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Affirmation of the Apostolic Faith in the Fourth Century* ed. S. Mark Heim (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1991), 108-116, here 113.

[66] A disturbing aspect of Williams' paper is his failure adequately to distinguish between what he calls the Free Church paradigm and Yoder's more carefully defined position. He recognises Yoder's stress on "the necessity of developing a truly historical perspective as the first step for developing a critique of the institutional church and proposing a revisionist alternative. More generally, however, the restitutionalist ideal is the preservation and succession of the true or invisible church from the apostolic age to the present, which means a different kin of historical continuity is present." (120-1) But the reader could easily come away with the impression that Yoder endorsed an ecclesiology of an invisible church, which is not the case, as we have seen in §4.3.2.

[67] See now D. H. Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition & Renewing Evagelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1999).

of assessing traditions of the Patristic period, and assessment was a necessity, most obviously in the case of Origen.[68] I now propose that, because the tradition of the community of God's people began in ancient Israel, the Christian tradition must be informed by (as well as transforming of) the tradition of Israel. Central to the church's earliest Scriptures, and to the life of the church through its first three centuries was its distinctive sociological form, linked to its Jewish heritage. This was lost by the fifth century.

In his recent ecclesiology, the Roman Catholic New Testament scholar, Gerhard Lohfink, has also recognised that something went wrong at this juncture in its history, though without identifying exactly why.

> The Church then, in the form of the "imperial Church," went through the experiment all over again that Israel had long ago suffered through, with enormous sacrifices, and this new experiment, too, brought with it costs that no one can calculate... for the Church as for Israel, the experiment with statehood was an enormous detour.[69]

Yoder's work has enabled us to identify the problem of Constantinianism as primarily one of ecclesiology, and specifically ecclesial identity (in terms of members' specific allegiance, embodied in specific practices) rather than ecclesial ontology (as Colin Gunton proposed, §2.2.1).

To reject the state-church link has frequently been dismissed as "sectarian," as a vision of withdrawal from the life of the world which neglects the church's calling to live within and witness to the world.[70] Yet it becomes increasingly clear that the very identity of the church cannot be bound up with the late modern or post-modern praxis of humanity which the Western state represents. John Milbank's influential work on modern secular reason as a deliberate cultural-political artifice[71] has galvanized a new ecclesiological confidence among mainstream theologians in the last decade.[72] Yet

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[68] See Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* (see n12 above), 337.
[69] Gerhard Lohfink, *Does God Need the Church? Towards a Theology of the People of God* (Collegeville, Min.: Liturgical, 1999), 118. He supports his case with an extensive quotation from Joseph Ratzinger.
[70] For a thorough consideration and rebuttal of the charge of sectarianism, see now Philip D. Kenneson, *Beyond Sectarianism: Re-imagining Church and World* CMMC (Harrisburg, Pa.: TPI, 1999).
[71] John Milbank, *Theology and Secular Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).
[72] See, e.g., the essay of Lutheran, Davis S. Yeago, "Messiah's People: The Culture of the Church in the Midst of the Nations," *Pro Ecclesia* VI/1 (1997) 147-71.

before all this Yoder had been articulating an ecclesiology which emphasised the calling of the church to holiness while maintaining its positive attitude towards the world, all because of its specific allegiance to its Lord.[73]

6.2.4 Schlabach's Alternative

In a thoughtful contribution to the recently published Yoder *Festschrift*, Gerald Schlabach has set out to question Yoder's emphasis upon Constantinianism in the realm of social ethics. He maintains that

> to define Constantinianism as the core problem for Christian social ethics is to concentrate our ethical reflection on the effort to avoid evil and unfaithfulness - rather than the challenge of embracing the good in a faithful manner....
>
> We would do better, then, to understand Constantinianism as only the most prominent instantiation of an even more basic problem, which bears an even more subtle temptation. This is the temptation of which Deuteronomy 6-9 warned God's people, and which arose precisely because they were God's people.[74]

This is the problem of "how to receive and celebrate the blessing, the *shalom*, the good, or "the land" that God desires to give, yet to do so without defensively and violently hoarding God's blessing." (451) After the exile (of which Deuteronomy warned), Israel again faced the question of how to live in the land, and several possible answers were in contention. Following Yoder, Schlabach holds that within this debate Jesus drew on voices which had nearly been lost (such as nonviolent suffering service), and

> effected a new kind of peoplehood through a new way of entering the land. Henceforth, the "land" would be a redemptive community life that was not

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[73] Drawing on Milbank, but more heavily influenced by Yoder, Barry A. Harvey surveys the Constantinian issue, though he supplements it with an important analysis of "the risk culture of postmodernity" in *Another City: An Ecclesiological Primer for a Post-Christian World* CMMC (Harrisburg, Pa.: TPI, 1999). He sees significant agreement between Yoder and Augustine: "Those who classify the way of the *altera civitas* as an effort to withdraw from the world only offer a counsel of despair, for they are in fact asserting that we have no choice but to resign ourselves to a postmodern fate. Indeed, the centuries-long attempt to provide the world with its spiritual form actually stripped Christians of the practices, institutions, and virtues that would allow them to be of genuine service to postmodern society. In short, not only for its own sake, but for the world's sake, the church need not, indeed must not see itself on a continuum between sectarian withdrawal and secular servitude." (138)

[74] Gerald W. Schlabach, "Deuteronomic or Constantinian: What is the most basic problem for Christian Social Ethics?" in *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas et al., (Grand Rapids, Mi./Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999) 449-471, here, 450. Unattributed page numbers in this subsection refer to this essay.

> finally fixed to any actual terrain, nor to the kind of tribal or national defence that always excludes some whom God is calling....(458)

However, this community still faced analogues of Israel's Deuteronomic juncture, so that

> Constantine remains a major temptation and a false answer but is not, finally, our primary problem. Life is our problem. The first of God's gifts is the very goodness of creation, and although sin has intervened, God's saving restoration of life and the good of right relationship actually re-poses the question: how is the faith community to anticipate the temptation and avoid the unfaithfulness that will find an occasion in God's very gift? *How to live rightly in "the land?"* (461)

I note that this is to reframe the more usual wilderness/exile typology for the Christian life.[75] Traditionally, the River Jordan has been taken as a type of death, with the promised land a type of life beyond the grave.

Schlabach's treatment of this "problem of life" is framed in terms of social ethics and significantly gives little attention to the issue of community identity.[76] Yet an essential feature of the Deuteronomic vision of Israel in the land of blessing was its insistence upon Israel's identity, defined by its specific allegiance to Yahweh (Deut 6;4) and what we might call its sociology, its community practices expressed in its statutes, all in continuity with its ancestral tradition (Deut 6:20-25). Thus the retention of Israel's identity was of central concern in Deuteronomy, and her social ethics cannot be understood independently of her identity. The equivalent concern of ecclesiology should therefore be: How may the church maintain her identity? - and her social ethics will be part of the answer. Now the identity of Israel was to be preserved in the land by the initial violent destruction of its inhabitants (Deut 7:1-6), though the process might take time (Deut 7:22). This observation forces attention onto the hermeneutical moves in Schlabach's use of Deuteronomy, for his appeal to it is subtle, allowing him to maintain that Augustine's resort to violence was mistaken (461).

Schlabach is wanting to employ Deuteronomy to think about the church's options once it reaches the second or third generation with its need for faithful institution

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[75] See, e.g., Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching among Exiles* (Louisville, Ken.: Westminster John Knox, 1997).

[76] Schlabach says of the Israelites, "Nor did they question their identity as the people whom God had called into covenant." (p450f)

building (464). But more than this, he is wanting to do social ethics, that is, to formulate how the church lives out its calling within the wider world. Here he makes a false move in translating from the Deuteronomic provision for Israel to live in the land since he is considering "overlapping communities that might live in *a land*" (463 my emphasis). In employing Deuteronomy's juncture to think about the church, it must be remembered that talk of "the land" assumed that it would be Israel's own land, as promised to the ancestors, and over which it would hold political control. Although Israel was intended to impress the nations with its wisdom (Deut 4:4-8) and it was warned that it would eventually become "an object of horror to all the kingdoms of the earth." (Deut 28:25), Deuteronomy focused upon life within Israel's own community. The question of engagement with the life of the wider world was a subordinate issue since Israel's focus was to be on its own faithfulness to YHWH in its own land.[77] Although Schlabach recognises that "land" is transformed into "redemptive community life" in the New Testament, he is inadvertently smuggling back aspects of the more literal Deuteronomic programme in order to think about the life of the church in "the land" of the wider world.

It seems to me that the issue of the transformation of land is dealt with most fully in the New Testament in the letter to the Ephesians. This first struck me because of the transformation of Deuteronomy's war theme in 6:10-17, which moves the conflict from the land of Israel to the heavenly places (6:12). But the letter opens with a eulogy for all the blessings which God has showered on his people (1:3-14), including adoption as his children, redemption through Christ's blood, knowledge of his ultimate purpose for all things, and the pledge of the Holy Spirit. All these are ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις, "in the heavenly places" (1:3; cf. 2:6), where Christ rules (1:20), and where God makes his wisdom known through the church to the rulers and authorities (3:10).[78] If the Deuteronomic question of how to live in the land is read in the light of the letter to the Ephesians, we must observe that the primary concern is the life of specific allegiance to

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[77] On Israel's ethics and the nations, see J. Gary Millar, *Now Choose Life: Theology and Ethics in Deuteronomy* (Leicester: Apollos, 1998), chapter 4. A serious weakness of this study is its failure to attend explicitly to the identity of God's people.

[78] See Andrew T. Lincoln, "A Re-Examination of 'The Heavenlies' in Ephesians," *NTS* 19 (1973) 468-83, and his commentary, *Ephesians* WBC 42, (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1990), 20-21.

God in Christ (5:1-2) which finds expression in the community growing towards maturity (4:1-16, 25-32; 5:19), intertwined with a distinctive lifestyle (4:17-24; 5:3-18), and embodied specifically in households characterized by mutual submission (5:21-6:9). The equivalent of "enjoying the good fruit of the land" in Ephesians is to experience that for which Paul prays (3:16-19); to become mature (4:13), to build up the community (4:29), to be filled with the Spirit (5:18), to create Christ-like households (5:32), and to pray for the saints and the ministry of the gospel (6:18-20).

Schlabach wants to say that the most basic problem for Christian social ethics is not the danger of Constantinianism but the constructive issue of how to live in the land. He seems to have overlooked Yoder's emphasis upon faithful church practices which constituted the constructive dimension of Christian social ethics. For all the questions of how the church can make direct contributions to political and social questions as understood in the wider world, its foremost contribution must always be precisely to be the church, and Yoder's insight was that Constantinian aspirations continued to hamper the church. My growing unease with Schlabach's proposal has been brought to a head by asking the question of ecclesial identity. He has not grasped the ecclesiological significance of the Constantinian shift in Christian social ethics. It was the ecclesiological dimension which gave Yoder's critique its heuristic power. Until the church comes to terms with the significance of its Constantinian shift, it will not be able to subject its social ethics to the scriptural critique required.

6.2.5 Clarification

The ongoing debate concerning Constantinianism is clouded by the complexity of the issues and by some simplistic formulations from parties who are critical of the phenomenon as well as by blanket refutations from those who have failed to understand the subtleties of Yoder's particular critique. I shall try to clarify the situation in a series of statements.

1. A self-critical approach to church history and the development of doctrine is essential. I find Yoder's discussion of the nature of Christian tradition and church history

persuasive. Naive and sweeping dismissals of the earnest efforts of previous generations of Christians are to be avoided, nevertheless the church which stands in the Jewish tradition dare not assume that it is beyond the possibility of radical error.

2. "Constantinianism" has a certain validity as a label for a significant shift in Christianity. Once Christianity became the official religion of the Empire, a significant shift occurred in the understanding of membership of the church, and thus in the nature of the church itself. There was an ecclesiological "fall." In chapter 2 I argued that one of the strongest pieces of evidence for this was the ethical about-face concerning violence. Where the consistent teaching of the Fathers in the early centuries had been against violence, by the early fifth century one could not be a soldier of the empire unless one was a Christian.[79]

3. "Constantinianism" may not be the best label to use for the detrimental changes that occurred in the fourth century. Many would grant that the Eusebian theologization of Constantine was misleading and indeed that Arianism proved attractive to the emperors of the fourth century, yet much other fourth century doctrine was consistent with Scripture (as far as it went), so there was not a doctrinal "fall." Yoder's view that the Nicene Creed was significantly politicised by Constantine is difficult to prove, yet the argument that social context inevitably influences the production of creedal statements has some weight. More important, however, is Yoder's argument that significant errors in the church began to be established earlier: many may be unconvinced by his aversion to Platonic thought, but the growing distancing from Judaism is now recognised as a significant problem by many[80]. If the Constantinian accommodation to the empire is seen as a "fall," it can only be understood in the light of a previous gradual downward movement.[81]

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[79] Alan Kreider, "War and the Culture of Peace in Early Christianity," a seminar given at the London Mennonite Centre, 18th September 1999, and at the Research Institute in Systematic Theology, King's College, London, 7th December 1999; publication forthcoming.

[80] Apart from Soulen's overview (§5.1.3), I notice that O'Donovan concedes the problem in many places, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 130f, 201, 220f, 258, 286.

[81] Yoder, "Locating the Fall in the age of Constantine means granting the benefit of the doubt to over two centuries of fallible, divided, confused church life, during which the vision of the major teachers was structurally sound." (*The Priestly Kingdom*, 129)

4. For these reasons, the phenomenon which has confused the identity of the church, tied it too closely to the affairs of the empire (and to emerging nation-states after the Reformation), and rendered it ethically unfaithful, may more helpfully be characterised as "Christendom." This may lose the specificity of the shift in the status of the church from illegal to licit religion, but it places the emphasis upon the accommodation between church and empire which eventually emerged in the Middle Ages. It takes into account that many of the theologians of the fourth and fifth centuries continued to be uneasy with the official accommodation. It highlights the issue which the magisterial Reformers hardly addressed.

6.3 Yoder's Ecclesiology as Prophecy

Standing within the Mennonite strand of the Christian tradition, Yoder sought to speak as widely as possible to the church of his day. We have seen how his understanding of tradition arose from Judaism and that within that tradition the role of prophecy is an essential component. I have characterised his theology as prophetic rather than systematic because of its local, essay form, but also because of the urgency of his message addressed to a church with significant blind spots. But now I propose to test the prophetic aspect of his work by examining his evaluation of his own Mennonite tradition. I will follow this with a consideration of his work on catholicity before drawing the threads of this chapter and the last into a conclusion.

6.3.1 Yoder's Evaluation of the Mennonite Tradition

Yoder subjected the history of the Mennonite church to analysis in a series of discussions with his fellows which reached written form in "Anabaptist Vision and Mennonite Reality"[82] By the late 19th century little of the basic position reached by the Mennonites of the late 16th century had been lost; military service and infant baptism were still

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[82] Yoder, "Anabaptist Vision and Mennonite Reality," in A. J. Klassen ed., *Consultation on Anabaptist-Mennonite Theology* (Fresno, Ca.; Council of Mennonite Seminaries, 1970), 1-46. Unattributed page references in this subsection are to this work.

refused, and some persecution continued. Yet "the inner meaning of this Mennonite identity had changed." (6) No new people were being drawn into the churches and those born in the churches had little freedom to choose. There was no longer a conscious rejection of the use of power and persons within the life of the church, nor a sense of missionary reconciliation in the midst of the wars of the world. In effect this small population of several tens of thousands constituted a small Christendom, a *Corpusculum Christianum.*

Focusing on the Old Mennonite grouping, Yoder showed that from the mid 19th to the mid 20th century a number of leaders introduced several innovations into the Mennonite church derived from their contact with other Christian denominations. The last of those mentioned was Harold S. Bender who brought into the denomination the resources of his education in the Protestant mainstream, and whose historical study enabled the rediscovery of "the Anabaptist vision." Yet none of these innovators was effective in remodelling the church with its structures after the Anabaptist vision. (27f) The claim to be Anabaptist was maintained though certain practices were tolerated which conflicted with Anabaptist principles. (27) The conclusion was that "Mennonitism still finds its identity most properly on the ethnic community level." (34)

John Roth has responded to Yoder's work by questioning his assumption that Christian faithfulness must entail the elimination of the gap between vision and reality. He accuses Yoder of producing a quite "ahistorical" argument since he was unclear when the Anabaptist vision was ever fully incarnated in human history. Secondly, where Yoder criticised the introduction of innovations derived from outside culture, he failed to define what "good" culture might be, and implied that the Anabaptist vision required a model of permanent revolution. Thirdly, Yoder's disjunction between Anabaptist vision and Mennonite reality forced a pernicious dualism which confused "ideas and abstract principles with the joyful messiness of lived experience."[83]

While Roth's criticisms are similar to those aimed at the notion of a "fall" of the church in the fourth century (and can be answered in a similar way), his final suggestions

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[83] John D. Roth, "Living between the Times: "The Anabaptist Vision and Mennonite Reality" Revisited," *MQR* (July 1995), 323-45; the three criticisms summarised here are found on 328-9.

fail to grapple with the thrust of Yoder's insights. He rightly points to a number of projects which have been undertaken in the last fifty years which embody the Anabaptist vision, such as the Christian Peacemaker teams of the 1980s and the Living in Faithful Evangelism programme of the 1990s. But he makes no proposals at all concerning Mennonite ethnocentrism in its church institutions, which was one of Yoder's main targets. Others have written adversely of Yoder's criticisms of the Mennonite churches[84], but it is not my purpose to enter the details of the debate. I simply wish to emphasize that Yoder's vision for the church made him as critical of his own tradition as any other.

6.3.2 Yoder's Appeal to Classical Catholicity

Yoder addressed this subject in his essay "Catholicity in Search of Location."[85] He maintained that the classical functional metadefinition, ascribed to Vincent of Lerins, that we should believe "what has been believed always, everywhere, by everyone" was a neat formula, but of limited help since it was simply not true that everyone everywhere has believed the same things. So what was catholicity and where might it be found?

Firstly, Yoder set his discussion in the context of Jesus' "Great Commission" at the end of the First Gospel (Matt 28:17-20) which projected five dimensions of universality:

* the ascending Lord claimed all authority in heaven and on earth;
* the eleven were to make disciples of all nations;
* they were to baptize them in the Triune name;
* they were to teach them all the commands he had given them;
* he would be with them always.

Here were five dimensions of "allness" or wholeness which sufficed "to state the metadefinitional catholic-making qualities we want to locate." (309) This shifted the whole subject away from an idealised lowest-common denominator of mere belief towards the community of specific allegiance to Jesus as Lord, geared to mission.

Secondly, Yoder explored the conventional definition:

> If it is to be meaningful to apply a criterion of catholicity, by asking concerning

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[84] E.g., Rodney J. Sawatsky, "Leadership, Authority and Power," *MQR* LXXI/2, (July 1997), 439-51. This article has received a devastating response from William Klassen in "Another Perspective on "Leadership, Authority and Power"" *MQR* LXXII/1 (Jan. 1998) 96-102.

[85] In *The Royal Priesthood*, 300-320. Unattributed page references in this section are to this essay and others in the same volume.

> any question what most people and most places have believed, that will have to happen *locally*. It will have to be done in each time and in each place. It cannot have to be decided elsewhere than where one is, by sending off to some authority at Rome or Lambeth, Geneva or 475 Riverside Drive[86] for a ruling. (306)

Indeed, local Christians would have to engage in a process of mutual witness and admonition because

> there is no way to locate the unity we seek before the process of seeking together. We can name no see, no symbol, no compendium of propositions that would not be part of the debate. Within the debate itself, the Scriptures will have decisive authority. This will not occur in a naive way.... (311)

In §3.4.1 we saw that Yoder's approach to ecumenism appealed for a process of dialogue which engaged painful divisions in the search for what unites Christians. Thus Yoder claimed that Catholicity must be located primarily procedurally:

> wherever and whenever everyone concerned converses about everything they do and should believe and do as they respond to the Lord who sent them to all the nations with all that he had taught them. Such formal Catholicity is denied if any people or any subjects, are excluded from that conversation. (319)

Much of Yoder's written work was produced for audiences outside his Mennonite tradition. Although he often referred to sixteenth century Anabaptism, he frequently appealed to figures and movements from other historical periods and parts of the world. He claimed that his vision was one of "unlimited catholicity because, in contrast to both sectarian and "established" views, it prescribes no particular institutional requisites for entering the movement whose shape it calls "restoration."" While he expounded a "radical reformation" confessional stance, he claimed that his "vision for discipleship is founded in Scripture and catholic tradition, and is pertinent today as a call for all Christian believers." He went so far as to claim that his writings were "a biblically rooted call to faith," addressed to Christians in general, and in this sense, "their appeal is to classical catholic Christian convictions properly understood."[87]

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[86] At the time this was a major ecumenical centre of bureaucracy in Manhattan.
[87] Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 4, 8, 9.

6.3.3. Conclusion

Yoder realised the significance of tradition in the life of the Christian community. Its tradition was rooted in its Jewish heritage as fulfilled and transformed by its Lord Jesus. During the course of church history various changes took place, altering the balance of certain facets of its tradition. The prophets in Israel had responded to various developments in its community life with condemnation or encouragement, moved as they were by God's Spirit, as well as being anchored in their founding traditions. In a similar way the tradition of the Christian community is open to assessment by its members as they are moved by the Spirit yet anchored in its criterial traditions, the Scriptures. If it was possible for Israel to so depart from its calling as to incur the judgement of exile and the destructions of 70 and 135 C.E., then significant departure from God's calling might result in some kind of radical discontinuity in the life of the church. The church was no less defectible than was Israel.

Yoder identified the estrangement of the church from Judaism in its early centuries as key among a number of factors in the gradual departure from its calling. These came to a head during the fourth century in the change of status of Christianity in the Roman empire from illicit to official religion. As Christendom became established, the official church could pronounce on any who refused to conform to its teachings and practices the verdict of schismatic, and to this day its theologians judge such as "sectarian," yet the question must be raised, "Who departed from what?" The identity of the church was significantly altered by the nominal inclusion of the majority of Christendom. This ecclesiological insight was especially Yoder's own.

In §1.3 I stated that the critic of prophetic ecclesiology should form a judgement concerning the truth and incisiveness of the author. Yoder drew his major inspiration from the Anabaptist reformers, yet he was critical of his own Mennonite tradition. He spent much of his life in dialogue with Christians of other backgrounds, appealing to the common tradition of Jesus Christ as known in the Scriptures, and committed to the reconciling process which he perceived at the heart of church practice. I have come to the opinion that John Howard Yoder was a prophet to the whole Christian church.

7. Authority and Leadership in the Community

Having discussed Yoder' ecclesiology in terms of the identity of the church, I am now in a position to focus on the particular question of the relation between ecclesial authority and community. In chapter 4 I described his view of a number of key practices, which sociologically characterized the church as a community. One of these practices, which he called "the Fullness of Christ," was "a new mode of group relationships, in which every member of a body has a distinctly identifiable, divinely validated and empowered role."[1] His understanding of leadership in the church sprang from from this "new mode of group relationships," and I will begin by setting out his vision for it.

Since developments in church organization after the New Testament period resulted in significant modifications of this style of leadership, typified in the division between clergy and laity, Yoder believed that he must challenge "the concentration of authority in the hands of office-bearers accredited on institutional grounds."[2] He produced a number of arguments against the prevailing understandings and practice of leadership in the church, most of which were collected in the small book entitled, *The Fullness of Christ: Paul's Revolutionary Vision of Universal Ministry*[3]. The arguments were taken a little further in the essay, "The One or the Many? The Pauline Vision and the Rest of the Reformation,"[4] and some were reiterated briefly in parts of chapter 4 of *Body Politics*. I have organized these arguments in terms of engagements with various sociological and theological models in the second section, incorporating engagements of my own.

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[1] Yoder, *Body Politics: five practices of the Christian community before the watching world* (Nashville, Ten.: Discipleship Resources, 1992), 47.
[2] Ibid., 51.
[3] Yoder *The Fullness of Christ: Paul's Revolutionary Vision of Universal Ministry* (Elgin, Ill.: Brethren Press, 1987). This was based on material already published in *Concern* 17, 33-93 (1969).
[4] Yoder, "The One or the Many? The Pauline Vision and the Rest of the Reformation," in *Servants of the Word: Ministry in the Believers Churches* ed. David B. Eller (Elgin, Ill.: Brethren Press, 1990), 51-64. This volume included responses by Gerald T. Sheppard (65-69) and Luke L. Keefer Jr. (71-79) and a rejoinder by Yoder in his "Epilogue: "Bethany was near Jerusalem: about two miles off."" (201-212).

In the light of these arguments I reflect further upon the exercise of authority in the community in the third section, developing three key issues: hierarchy, the household image and the exercise of authority, and response to the abuse of authority.

7.1 Yoder's Vision for the Renewal of the Christ's Rule through the Spirit

In a short essay which he wrote on Christian ministry in 1955 for the Mennonite paper, *Gospel Herald*, Yoder set out a view, based in the New Testament, which was to change little over the years. He began by distinguishing between the apostolic and the pastoral ministry. The office of the apostle was of the greatest authority, but was unrepeatable and untransmissible, and so would not be reproduced within contemporary churches, although an evangelist in a pagan environment might come close to being an exception. Scripture was the form which apostolic authority currently took, so that the New Testament replaced the apostles as witness to the resurrection of Christ.[5]

Yoder then gave prominence to the pastoral ministry, while recognising that the word "pastor" was foreign to traditional Mennonite vocabulary. The Good Shepherd had handed responsibility for guidance, nurture and loving care to the apostles, and they in turn had passed it to others (Acts 20:28ff).

> In contrast to the office of apostle proper, the function of pastor is therefore transmissible; it is truly the primary office in the church after the apostle's departure. It involves responsibilities for leading the congregation in worship, in service, in seeking God's will, in discipline if necessary, in counselling, in the admission and training of new members; in short, the pastoral ministry is the primary human leadership of the church.[6]

He thought that the terms "pastor," "elder" and "bishop" all referred to different aspects of the same office in the New Testament.[7] He then emphasised his key point: there were generally several elder-pastors-bishops in one congregation. "Thus instead of a single

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[5] On Scripture, see §6.1.

[6] Yoder, "The New Testament View of the Ministry," *Gospel Herald*, XLVIII/6, February 8, 1955, 121-4, here 121.

[7] Everett Ferguson wrote recently, "The New Testament uses "bishop" interchangeably with "pastor," "steward" and "presbyter" for the same community leaders (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Titus 1:5-7)." *EEC*, s.v. "Bishop", 182-185, including an extensive bibliography.

pastor per church we must think of a council of pastors, sharing the responsibilities of leadership in all the areas mentioned above as belonging to the pastoral ministry." (122) So the subsequent movement toward a one-pastor system was not a movement in the direction of the New Testament, and the burden of proof lay with those who did not follow the biblical example.

The New Testament church had a wealth of other ministries; healing, prophecy, speaking in tongues, evangelism. The role of teacher had a particular significance and responsibility, "Yet no amount of training justifies giving to the teacher the pastoral responsibilities. Sometimes some of the elders may also be teachers (1 Tim 5:17), but the teacher is not automatically an elder (as, for instance, when he is young)...." He held that the trend towards the one minister pattern was "a serious deviation from the Biblical pattern," (124) although he did allow that a lone minister's responsibilities might be practical if limited to teaching, evangelism, secretarial work or music, so long as the pastoral responsibility in the church was borne by a council of several elders-bishops-pastors.

7.1.1 Yoder's Theology of Leadership and Authority in the Church

Yoder's view of leadership in the church must be understood in relation to his view of the practice of gifts by each member of the community, already introduced in §4.1.4. His discussion in *Body Politics* took the matter of gifts further: in the Pauline texts (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4), the lists of roles described "functions within the gathered *ecclesia*: apostle, prophet, teacher, elder," and Paul's associated body metaphor accentuated "reciprocal accountability and interdependence." Elsewhere in Western cultural history there were body images which gave special honor to one of the members of the body as its head, and thereby pointed toward hierarchical visions of society. "Paul's metaphor, on the other hand, relativizes hierarchy because Christ, not one of the other members, is the head."[8]

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[8] Yoder, *Body Politics*, 53.

This particular use of the body metaphor for the church allowed for human leaders and accorded them a proper respect, yet it made of them no special class. Ecclesiologically, it did not give the role of head to any human being, since Christ was the head of the body. Of course, we know that even within the writings of the Apostolic Fathers a different view emerged, one which saw human leaders (i.e., bishops) as earthly counterparts to the heavenly head of the church.[9] But Yoder was arguing directly once more: the institution of the church was not an analogue of relationships within the Trinity, nor did human leaders represent God to the laity. Instead, Christ was the head of the church in the fullest sense, made present by the Spirit who resided in all members. His ecclesial polity was driven by an immediate view of Christ's headship, actualized by the Spirit and discerned by the whole community.

Yoder argued that Paul's lists indicated a certain functional hierarchy (prophecy over tongues) and a chronological priority (first apostles, then prophets...). There was a kind of procedural priority given to the function of elder-teacher, though the teaching office was warned against, because of the special temptations of playing with words (James 3:1; cf., 1 Tim 2:4). Further procedural priority was given to the function of the elder-moderator in order for the various gifts to be exercised in effective ministry,[10] yet those with this gift were to have no greater significance than those with other gifts.[11] So far Yoder was recognizing a certain kind of leadership, one which was orientated to the life of the community and an expression of gifts given to the community as a whole. But

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[9] This theological move goes back to Ignatius who made the bishops, deacons and elders respectively images of God, Christ and the apostles (Ign. *Magn.* 6, *Trall.* 3). Brian J. Capper, remarking on the awkwardness of this ordering and analogy, suggests that the image arose from an earlier analogy between the president of the eucharistic meal and the deacons who served at it with God and Christ. See "Order and Ministry in the Social Pattern of the New Testament Church," in *Order & Ministry*, edd. Christine Hall & Robert Hannaford (Leominster: Gracewing, 1996), 61-103, here 66f. Yoder noted that "a particular pattern of episcopacy was already coming to be given normative value" by the time of Ignatius: "the issues of ministry and church order found themselves both fixed and challenged much earlier in history than the more "doctrinal" questions which were to take centuries to come to dogmatic definition." *The Fullness of Christ*, 85.

[10] In his earlier essay, "The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood," Yoder indicated that the community needs "agents of direction, of memory, of linguistic self-consciousness (teachers), of order and due process." This was published in *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), here 28-34.

[11] See also *The Fullness of Christ*, 10-11. Unattributed page references from here onwards in this section refer to this work.

such order as obtained was of a functional, chronological or procedural kind, and emphatically not of an ontological kind. Most significantly:

> The eldership, in the early church as in the synagogue, seems to have been plural, shared with a team of colleagues, a role for which one is not qualified without long and successful experience of family life. Thus the ultimate impact of Paul's use of body image is clearly and consistently antihierarchical.[12]

So far I have noted Yoder's characterization of Paul as one who "relativizes hierarchy," and now who is "consistently antihierarchical." Yet he recognised that Paul was not against some sort of leadership structure.

> It is part of the misunderstanding which keeps Paul's teaching on the universality of ministry from being understood, to assume that Paul's is a vision of "leaderlessness" or of "diffused" unlocalizable leadership. Such concepts are current in the anti-authoritarian mood of modern culture, but this is not what we find in the New Testament. We find rather several types of leadership, exercised by several types of qualified persons, each clearly identified. (101)

Thus his aversion to "hierarchy" did not imply a modern egalitarianism; it should be understood in reference to a graded system of importance, honour or ontology (perhaps with the priestly overtones which etymology suggests). There are other ways of construing "hierarchy," and so further clarification of this concept is necessary. I will explore it further in §7.3.1.

Yoder's point was that church leadership, as understood in the New Testament, was practiced as a contribution to the life of each community by several members of that community. One implication of this community-based understanding of leadership was its local nature: leaders should be responsible to the community which they served and which appointed them.[13] Church leadership was not to be practiced, as it later came to be, by an inner circle of the universal church, dedicated professionals deemed to be carrying a higher religious authority or holiness than the majority of the members.

Yoder was calling for a restitution of the New Testament vision of multiple ministry and "collegial leadership of the self-governing local congregation." (11) This was not a naive restitutionalism[14] since he recognised that there was no one complete,

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[12] Yoder, *Body Politics*, 54.
[13] Yoder, "The Jewish Christian Schism Revisited" (Shalom Desktop Publication, 1996), 97f.
[14] On restitutionalism, see §6.2.1.

final pattern for church order in the New Testament. He was able to provide a list of constants (multiplicity, plurality, diversity, universality, government, teaching, prophecy, itinerancy) within flexibility, along with certain principles of movement within such stability. But he refused to provide a complete description of congregational organization since this would deny the flexibility on which he insisted for the local situation. (90-91)

7.1.2 A Reformation Yet to Come About

Yoder reviewed numerous dissenting and reform movements in the history of the church which had criticised the restriction of ministry to the clergy: "enthusiastic" groups which claimed a wider working of the Spirit in praise or prophecy from the Montanists to the Albigenses and Camisards; monastic movements or para-monastic groups like the Beghards and Waldenses; ultimately the Reformation rhetoric of "the priesthood of all believers." Yet even the radical congregationalists of the sixteenth century never made much of the Pauline vision of universal ministry, though they challenged the legally authorized and formally qualified patterns of the day. The very first Anabaptists tended to recognize only the leadership of the itinerant apostle, yet within two years the Schleitheim articles called for a local shepherd, marked by his rootage within the local community which called him to serve. There were partial parallels in German protestant Pietism and Methodism, yet without challenging the role of the ordained.

Historical movements which had come close to this view included the Quakers and Plymouth Brethren. These approximations to the vision were derived from precise criticisms of the clerical patterns of the established churches. They created non-clerical patterns of orderly church life which gave the lie to those who assumed that central clerical leadership was necessary to retain identity. (37-43)

> Yet the historian looks in vain for a reformation in which the theological conviction that what the gospel says about the Spirit makes everyone a minister, or the concrete experience of everyone being made a minister of the Spirit, thus creating a new community.[15]

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[15] Yoder, "The One or the Many?", 52.

Was the Latin American base ecclesial church a rediscovery of the Pauline vision of universal ministry?

> Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that persons of all ages and both sexes are drawn to servant roles in the building of community from the bottom up, empowered by the Holy Spirit, credentialed by the local body, bearers of God's grace to one another. In the power of God, something has happened in Central America similar to what Paul was writing about to Rome and Corinth. Yet on another level, this is not the Pauline vision at all. The space made for multiple "lay" leadership is laid out by segregating it. It is official episcopal interpretation and authorization, from the priest's functions, that continue to define the church proper as the place where the sacraments happen. (98f)

None of these movements had sought to implement a reformation guided by the New Testament vision of every-member empowerment.[16] He suggested: "why not conceive of *specific* ministries being assigned to all members *specifically*, so that what is done away with is not the specialized ministry, but the undifferentiated laity?" In advocating a reformation which had yet to come about,[17] Yoder was making his most original contribution to ecclesiology in the sense that he was going beyond the Anabaptists. Yet he would never have claimed that it was original because it was a vision which he found in the New Testament.

> If we choose to agree with the social-science averages and the historical precedents that the Pauline vision will not "work," that desperate prediction will fulfil itself. If on the other hand we should choose to wager on the apostle's confidence that a new age was in fact breaking in and in fact still is, that resurrection and Pentecost remain the foundational promise of our history, there is nothing in the record to exclude the renewed empowerment the apostles promised.[18]

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[16] Those who sought to open ordination to women "grant the most basic mistake, and then try to correct for it on the surface." (52) But if the vision were to be retrieved, gender would become a non-issue. The equal dignity of every ministering person in the body of Christ "is a present fact to be appropriated by faith in the empowering work of the Holy Spirit." (53).
[17] Yoder, *Body Politics*, 59-60. Alan Kreider has taken up this call in his essay "Abolishing the Laity," in *Anyone for Ordination*, ed. Paul Beasley-Murray (Tunbridge Wells, Kent: MARC, 1993), 84-111.
[18] Yoder, "The One or the Many," 64.

7.2 Debating Leadership through various Models of the Church

In order to advocate his vision of renewed leadership of the community, Yoder had to debate a number of views, traditional and scholarly, concerning the exercise of authority in the church. To clarify these debates I have arranged his rather *ad hoc* discussions into a series of engagements with models assumed or proposed to account for prevailing or alternative institutions of authority. I have included a discussion of one model which he did not consider at all because of its significance in the wider debate. But before embarking on an assessment of these debates, I need to put them in perspective by reflecting on what has become in recent years a complex field of historical, sociological and theological study.

Firstly, by far the greatest effort to understand the earliest Christian communities and their leadership has been directed at the Pauline churches.[19] This is understandable on two counts: we have more written sources which provide straightforward information about these churches than any others, and the Pauline letters are perhaps the earliest witnesses to the life of the early churches. Other New Testament letters and the Book of Revelation provide a relatively small amount of information about leadership elsewhere. Whilst many proposals have been made concerning the communities which lie behind the Gospels, these remain hypothetical and indeed problematic.[20] The Book of Acts provides the only other descriptions of early churches and their leadership, though it was written in the last third of the first century and doubts have been expressed by scholars about its historical reliability.[21] Two overall errors must be avoided in working with the New Testament literature: it must not be assumed that all the Pauline churches were

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[19] For a recent survey of the field with a considerable bibliography, see Richard S. Ascough, *What are they Saying about the Formation of Pauline Churches?* (New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1998).
[20] For a set of essays challenging this whole project see *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Baukham (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998).
[21] For a generally positive assessment of the historical value of Acts see the six volume series entitled *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*, consulting editor, I. Howard Marshall, produced under the auspices of Tyndale House, Cambridge, (Grand Rapids, Mi. & Carlisle, Cumbria: Eerdmans & Paternoster, 1993 onwards).

organized in the same way,[22] and it must not be assumed that all the other Christian churches were organized in ways reflected in Paul's letters.[23]

Secondly, historical understanding of the New Testament writings has advanced considerably on literary and sociological fronts during the last third of the twentieth century, but, as Luke Timothy Johnson writes, these approaches have failed to yield significant insight into the language of religious experience in early Christian writings; in fact, they seem to have moved even further away from such an appreciation.

> For one thing, social-scientific approaches tend to privilege etic or outsider discourse rather than insider or emic discourse. But something else is also at work. I have noted how much the language of experience in the New Testament involves language about power as a positive reality. The development of what is sometimes called the "hermeneutics of suspicion" within scholarship and of "ideological criticism" as its methodological manifestation, however, leads to quite a different perception of power and language about power. If religious symbols generally are taken to be epiphenomenal to human struggles for social and political position, then power, rather than a transcendental reality that is encountered as Other is invariably an instrument of control wielded in behalf of interested parties. Claims to the experience of transcendent power should be demystified as camouflage for political-position taking within religious traditions.[24]

Johnson goes on to make important criticisms of the work of the influential historian of religion, Jonathan Z. Smith, to the effect that his employment of a general theoretical framework has led him to ignore the specific contours of Christianity as a historical phenomenon.[25] He goes on to argue that historical analysis must be complemented by a

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[22] See Ascough, 97-8.

[23] For an attempt to explore the diversity of the early churches represented in all the New Testament writings in relation to diversity in first century Judaism, see Howard Clark Kee, *Who Are the People of God? Early Christian Models of Community* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995). I found this a conceptually disappointing work because the typology of models of community which Kee proposes fails to account for the way these models intertwine in the various New Testament writings. E.g. "The community where God dwells with his people" is not as particular to 1 Peter, Revelation and Hebrews as Kee suggests (in his chapter 4), but is significant in the Pauline writings (as he partially acknowledges, 121-3), and much more so than he admits in the Gospel of John.

[24] Luke Timothy Johnson,*Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 24-5.

[25]Ibid., 36. Johnson comments on a number of writings by Jonathan Z. Smith, including *Map is not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* Studies in Judaism and Later Antiquity, ed. J. Neusner, vol.23 (Leiden: E. J. Brill. 1978); *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jamestown* Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); *Drudgery Divine: On the*

phenomenological approach to earliest Christianity's religious language and behaviour in order to avoid an ahistorical tendency inherent in modern history writing which rules out religious language of "the Other."[26] This insistence upon the primacy of an approach which does justice to the language of religious experience, whilst not denying the significance of the sociological dimension, complements the insistence on the place of the theological which we found in Yoder (§3.4.3).

Once the importance of an approach to the New Testament which does justice to its particular religious language is recognised and coupled with a theological vision, it becomes clearer that exploration of the church's origins must take its Jewish heritage seriously (chapter 5 above), though not denying its engagement with Hellenistic culture. Thus, where Richard Ascough proposes that the social history of the Pauline churches can be understood in terms of four models of community formation - the synagogue, philosophical schools, the ancient mysteries and voluntary associations - but refuses to give any one of these models priority, we will be inclined to regard the synagogue as more significant. But, more important, where Ascough discounts the household as a model on the grounds that "this model is not mutually exclusive of the other models,"[27] we will show reasons to take it much more seriously.

With these considerations in mind I now turn to examine the various models. Firstly, Yoder rejected an influential sociological way of accounting for the changes in the practice of leadership that occurred in the early church on the theological grounds that it began from a faulty understanding of the manifestation of the Spirit in the earliest communities. Secondly and thirdly, I will consider his rejection of the traditional socio-theological model of priesthood and the linked model of the monarchy. Fourthly, I will explore his advocacy of the synagogue as a socio-historical model and test it against other aspects of his portrayal of the early church which suggest that the synagogue is not

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Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity The Jordan Lectures in Comparative Religion 14 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

[26] Johnson, 39-68, appealing to the earlier history-of-religions school. He applies this to rituals of initiation, glossolalia and meals in chapters 3-5, but does not address the issue of leadership.

[27] Ascough, 9.

a sufficient theological model. This leads me to propose, fifthly, an alternative socio-theological model, that of the household. A conclusion follows.

7.2.1 Criticism of the Sociological Model of the Institutionalization Process

In his lectures on the development of doctrine within the Patristic period, Yoder had briefly described the establishment of episcopacy, without appearing to be particularly critical of it. Here is a summary of several paragraphs from *Preface to Theology*:

> After the death of the apostles, who had carried final authority because of their first-hand knowledge of Jesus, there is evidence (in the *Didache*) of influential itinerant figures, but the longer range solution was the development of the resident episcopacy. (97-98) Soon a pattern developed in which there was one man in each city who was chosen by the whole church there to preside over all the elders. He then rose further to have responsibility for a number of congregations and to have a role which was more than that of spokesman or moderator. Although elected by the whole church in a city, he became increasingly able to act without that church. By the year 150 episcopacy was clearly established and derivative issues began to arise, such as the succession and need for archbishops. This development followed the natural cultural slant, it paralleled the Roman administration of the empire.

This expression "natural cultural slant" was to receive considerable elaboration in other writings.[28]

There are a number of ways in which scholars have sought to understand the communal and leadership dimensions of the early church. By the end of the nineteenth century there had developed a common consensus in Protestant scholarship which understood the early church as modelled on the voluntary association.[29] Rudolf Sohm then challenged this consensus with his emphasis upon the place of charism. He proposed that a vitally new kind of community arose among the disciples of Jesus: for a relatively short period of time charismatic gifts obviated formal organization. But then, in response

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[28] The quotation is from *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method* (Elkhary, Ind.: Co-op Bookstore, 1981), 99-100. In these lectures Yoder did not embark on a criticism of episcopacy.

[29] The development of this view from the time of John Wyclif has been charted by James Tunstead Burtchaell, *From Synagogue to Church: Public Services and Offices in the Earliest Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), who helpfully emphasises a key theological presupposition held within the consensus; that Jesus radically broke away from Israel in forming his community. He argues that this presupposition was fed by the Lutheran rejection of a Judaism characterized by law (183f).

to the threat of division and heresy in the church, an official hierarchy became necessary.[30] The influence of Sohm's view was maintained through much of the twentieth century by Hans von Campenhausen, Ernst Käsemann and Eduard Schweizer.[31] However, other scholars argued that from earliest times the church had had an institutional form, either in competition with the charismatic form (Adolf von Harnack), alongside it (Hans Lietzmann), or much more significant than it (e.g., Gregory Dix).[32]

Yoder argued that the problem with this debate was that it had been largely determined by ecclesiastical presuppositions and (in its more recent form) mainly driven by Max Weber's sociological model of "routinization" which opposed charism to institution.[33] To distinguish between "gifts" on the one hand and "offices" or "ministries" on the other was to impose a categorization foreign to the New Testament, and thus to engage in a circular argument. The usual way in which the difference between the two kinds of ministry, so distinguished, was described was in terms of ordination. Yet despite some references to the laying on of hands in the New Testament, there were no grounds for a single clear conception of ordination, applying to some Christians and not to others. (28)[34] The fundamental problem was that Weber's use of the term "charisma" was significantly different from Paul's usage in 1 Cor 12-14 in that his teaching was against the over-valuing of a special endowment of a few. (32f)

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[30] Rudolph Sohm, *Kirchenrecht I: Die geschichtlichen Grundlagen* (Leipzig: Dunker & Humbolt, 1892).
[31] English translations of these works appeared as follows: Hans von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University, 1969); Ernst Käsemann, "Ministry and Communion in the New Testament," in *Essays on New Testament Themes* (SBT 41, London: SCM, 1964), 63-134; Eduard Schweitzer, *Church Order in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1961).
[32] For a good survey of the debate with bibliographical details see Enrique Nardoni, "Charism in the Early Church since Rudolph Sohm: An Ecumenical Challenge," *TS* 53 (1992), 646-662.
[33] *The Fullness of Christ*, 28. Unattributed page references in this subsection are to this work. Weber's sociological model is to be found in his essay, "The Sociology of Charismatic Authority," in*From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* edd. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 245-52.
[34] For a detailed presentation of this view of ordination, see Marjorie Warkentin, *Ordination: A Biblical-Historical View* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1982).

The sociologist, Rodney Stark, has also dismissed Weber's employment of charisma on the grounds of its circularity.[35] Yoder's argument that the employment of the sociological model of routinization obscured the plural nature of community leadership in the early church as envisioned by the writers of the New Testament is strong.[36] He was correct to maintain that it idealised the earliest leaders while intrinsically disparaging later church organization.

> To have an outward order is neither (as would be the case for Sohm or Brunner) already a sign that the church is fallen, nor is it on the other hand grounds for selling out to other than Christological determinations of what that order should be.[37]

For Yoder there was no necessary contradiction between form and Spirit.[38] I would add that if the form of the church were to be appropriate to the expression of Jesus' authority through the whole church, then the empowering Spirit would continue to be present in the church. One might even grant Weber's analysis of the process of detrimental routinization if the empowering Spirit was confined and limited (as Yoder's stance would suggest it was), but then insist that such restriction of the Spirit was not inevitable.

7.2.1.1 Early Catholicism and the Pastoral Letters

One obvious problem for Yoder's position was the supposed evidence for "Early Catholicism" in the Pastoral epistles. Within the sociological model it was proposed that they represent an accommodation between the early "charismatic" and later institutionalized forms of leadership.[39] Yoder resolved the difficulty by an ingenious rearrangement of conventional notions of development, recognising that the instructions to the apostolic delegates envisaged a certain autocratic exercise of authority, but taking

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[35] Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 24.
[36] Similarly, H. N. Ridderbos has argued that "the contrast between the charismatic and institutional is at bottom just as false as that between charismatic and non-charismatic ministries in the church." *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. J. R. De Witt (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1975), 444.
[37] Yoder, "The Basis of Barth's Social Ethics," (unpublished lecture at the constitutive meeting of the Midwestern section of the Karl Barth Society at Elmhurst, Ill. Sept. 29-30, 1978), 9.
[38] Compare Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1996), 346-7.
[39] For a discussion of "Early Catholicism" see James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1990²), chapter XIV.

them as provisional measures for churches which were "younger" than were those at Rome and Corinth when Paul wrote to them. In other words, if a concept of development was needed to explain the different organisations of various churches in the New Testament, these new churches were moving towards the congregationalism of Paul's established churches, rather than away from it, as in the "Early Catholicism" hypothesis. "Timothy himself, as he supplies these churches with a qualified plural ministry, is moving out of and not into a monarchic role." (26)

I have not come across this argument in any other commentator on the New Testament. It can be tested against the evidence of 1 Thessalonians, a letter written to a "young" church[40] which included an appeal at the head of a series of general exhortations: "to respect those who labor among you, and care[41] for you in the Lord and admonish you: esteem them very highly in love because of their work" (1 Thess 5:12f). It is likely that the reference here was to a group of patrons similar to those of the household of Stephanas who acted as patrons to the church at Corinth (1 Cor 16:15-18).[42] A comparison between these two passages indicates something of a stronger appeal for respect of the patrons at Thessalonica than at Corinth, which might support Yoder's contention. But it is doubtful that this could overcome the objection that, at least in 1 Timothy, the church envisaged had moved past the "young" stage since an overseer "must not be a recent convert." (1 Tim 3:6) Thus Yoder's proposal fails to convince.

My own view of 1 Timothy is that a good case can be made for its somewhat authoritarian tone being occasioned by the Ephesian church being led astray by some of its own elders.[43] But even in such a major crisis, the letter did not argue for single

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[40] According to the Book of Acts, Paul left Thessalonica after only three Sabbaths (17:1-10), but 1 Thess 2:9 gives the impression of a longer stay according to Charles A. Wanamaker, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians* NIGNTC (Grand Rapids, Mi./Exeter: Eerdmans, 1990), 7 and Jerome Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 102. For a different view, see I. Howard Marshall, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* NCB (Grand Rapids, Mi./London: Eerdmans/Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1983), 5f. Yet all would agree that at the time of Paul's writing the church "had been but recently established" (Murphy O'Connor, 25).

[41] For this translation of προϊστάμενους see Wanamaker, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*,192: "If Paul had intended the participle to refer to "presiding," it would have been more natural to have put it first rather than in the middle of the series."

[42] Wanamaker *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 193f, depending on Meeks, Theissen and Holmberg.

[43] Gordon Fee has ably argued the case for this scenario, along with Pauline authorship, in *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* GNC (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), xix-xxvi. Other recent commentators who

episcopal leadership, and in each of the Pastoral letters church leadership was plural.[44] Yoder was on stronger ground in a second argument when he refuted the view that the figures of Timothy and Titus in the Pastorals themselves represent an emerging episcopate.

> One is struck by the absence, either in the vocabulary or in the functions described of any reference to a congregational or diocesan base... They were [Paul's] proxies... the figures of Timothy and Titus demonstrate not yet the rise of the resident bishop but the survival into the second generation of the role of the authoritative church-planting itinerant. (27)

Robert Banks acknowledges that the ἐπίσκοπος casts a longer shadow over various aspects of the church's life than any figure mentioned in the other Pauline letters, yet "to talk of the institutionalization of the ministry in the Pastorals is to exaggerate."[45] Yoder would have dealt better with the Pastorals if he had connected this approach with his recognition of the place of structured leadership.

7.2.2 Criticism of the Socio-Theological Model of Priesthood

The second model of church leadership to be considered is that of an enduring priesthood in the church. This is the classic view of Orthodoxy and Catholicism and I will explore it through the particular hypothesis of Douglas Powell who has suggested that there was a coherent theological concept which informed the primitive doctrine of authority in the church and the primitive doctrine of a clergy and a succession.[46] The eventual official adoption of this order was "not a sociological expedient later clothed in a few rags of theological interpretation, but from the very beginning a part of this cohesive theological scheme" which had indeed a "levitical rationale." (301)[47] This concept was one of a

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accept Pauline authorship include George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* NIGNTC (Grand Rapids, Mi./Carlisle, Cumbria: Eerdmans/Paternoster, 1992) and Luke Timothy Johnson, *Letters to Paul's Delegates: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus* NTC (Harrisburg, Pa.: TPI, 1996).

[44] Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, xxxiii. If 1 Tim 3:1-7 & Tit 1:7 envisage a μονεπίσκοπος then the most that this would indicate is the process of development of the congregational representative, rather than the established institution. See, R. Alastair Campbell, *The Elders: Seniority Within Earliest Christianity* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 243-4. On Campbell's work see below §7.2.5.

[45] Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994²), 197.

[46] Douglas Powell, "Ordo Presbyterii," *JTS* NS Vol. 26 (1975), 290-328. Unattributed page numbers in these first two paragraphs of this subsection refer to this essay.

[47] It should be noted that "The episcopacy advocated by Ignatius is not described in priestly language (not

centre which transformed those surrounding it, or "first-fruits" by means of which a harvest would be gathered, an "elect of the elect" (321).

> It is not merely the handing-on of an office (generally assumed to be mechanical and unspiritual), but also the handing-on of a torch (generally assumed to be dynamic and spiritual); and the two are not contrary to one another. (326)

There is much in Powell's position which is attractive. It is certainly true that some in the Christian church are further along the road of Christian discipleship than others, and thereby have a degree of responsibility within it for those who are less mature. Yet I have reservations concerning an important section in which Powell insists that in the early church there was a hierarchy not of function, but of honor, of status and prestige (319). If such language is to be used, it must be emphasised that the usual forms of behaviour associated with honor and status are called in question in the church of Jesus Christ (Mk 10:43-4). History shows that this reversal was itself overturned in the growing trappings of clerical status, especially after Constantine.

Yet Yoder's emphasis upon the fullness of Christ suggests that there are other problems with Powell's view. The development of the office of clergy in the Patristic period soon constricted the work of the Holy Spirit to the ministry of the few. Yoder's perception of the relation between the Old and New Testaments[48] reminds us that the notion of an "elect within the elect" is derived from the Old Testament concept of the remnant, in which only a minority were faithful to the calling given to all Israel. But it must be remembered that this remnant was in no way identified with the institutionalized priesthood; if anything it was made up of persecuted prophets,[49] their followers and some ordinary people. If this notion were to be applied to the history of the Christian

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even on the analogy of the Old Testament priesthood, as in Clement [*1 Clem.* 40:5]), is not based on apostolic succession, and is congregational, not diocesan)." Everett Ferguson, s.v. "Bishop," *EEC*, 185.

[48] See §5.2 above.

[49] Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah, one of the Anathoth priests likely related to Abiathar, the marginalized priest of David (Jer 1:1; 1 Kgs 2:26). Since he is often represented as having connections with the temple, he may have been a priest or cult prophet. But if so, he was not part of the establishment, power-holding priesthood of his day. For a discussion, see R. P. Carroll *Jeremiah* OTG (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 81-3.

church it would support a very Protestant critique of the institution. Thus Powell seems to have taken the attractive notion of handing on true faith and discipleship, and subtly (and misleadingly) linked it to the institutional form of Christianity.

Yoder's understanding of the clergy took the form, not of a constant, but of a trajectory through the Scriptures:

> Already in Ancient Israel, God acted to relativize the centrality of the religious specialist... the activities of prophets, judges, and "the elders in the gate" relativized the centrality of ritual life although they still honoured it. After the end of kingship and the loss of the Jerusalem temple, Jewry survived not by creating a surrogate for the temple so as to keep using the priesthood, but by inventing a new role, that of the rabbi, steward of the Torah, and a new social instrument, the synagogue, formed of any ten households, with no religious specialist needed in their midst at all.[50]

In ancient Israel and then in second temple Judaism the function of the professional religionist was present, accepted, used; but it was also relativized in value and filled with new meaning. "It is not central in Israel's identity: it is the point where Israel's life is most like that of the nations around, and the Hebrew story moves away from it, toward the pentecostal revolution of the new covenant."[51]

> By the time of Jesus, the Temple with its priesthood had been restored, but he relativized it again. He formed a movement out of fishermen, zealots, and publicans - and women - sending seventy of them [cf., Num 11:25-9] out across the countryside... Among the first Christians at Jerusalem were some priests who continued to take their turns at officiating in the Temple, but they had no priestly role in the messianic synagogues because there was no sacrificial worship there. The specialized purveyor of access to the divine is out of work since Pentecost.[52]

According to Acts, Hebrews, James and 1 Peter, as well as the Pauline epistles, the early church saw a departure from the religious specialist in the introduction of a multiplicity of ministries, distributed through the whole church, and attributed to the work of Christ and the Spirit. In particular,

> Priesthood, to the extent that it applies at all in the new covenant, is the character of the entire people of God, not of any single priestly person in the

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[50] Yoder, *Body Politics*, 55-6

[51] Yoder, *The Fullness of Christ*, 8. Unattributed page references from here on in this subsection are to this work.

[52] Yoder, *Body Politics*, 56.

> church. Thus Revelation 5 and 1 Peter 2 take up the Mosaic phrase "a kingdom of priests" to designate the *abolition* of the distinct priestly role (whereas the prophetic role and the eldership, and something like the rabbinate, are carried over in the New Testament church). Priests joining the Jerusalem church did not create a Christian priesthood. (16)

There was no concept of laity as opposed to clergy since all were members of the people (*laos*) of God. (14) The embodiment of the gift of the Holy Spirit in all members of the church was something which could not be dismissed as a mere *adiaphoron* (17).

Yet by the middle of the second century, the clerical class had reappeared in Christianity along with the vocabulary and functions of priesthood (*hiereus* or *sacerdos*). Although vestiges of the early multiple ministry remained in the medieval church, most atrophied from disuse or became (like the diaconate) mere steps on the ladder to the priesthood. Yoder identified three kinds of motive behind the changes which brought about this reversion to the universal pattern of the single, sacramentally qualified religionist (18-19).

* Well intentioned, capable people took over ministry where a need appeared rather than work more slowly to evoke, nurture and coordinate multiple gifts among others, in dependence on the Holy Spirit.
* Some new believers entering the Christian community may have brought with them the conventional expectation of the single spirit-bearer.
* Less worthy factors would have included the cult of power, the control of custom and lack of imagination.

Finally, the church came to adopt "a set of forms and ceremonies more like the non-Christian cults of the first century than like early Christianity." (19) Yoder used the terms "fall" and "loss" to characterize this development, though he made it clear that this was not equivalent to apostasy. (18) It parallelled the development of the estrangement between the church and synagogue, first documented by Justin Martyr (ca. AD 150), although it was reinforced by the later transformation of Christianity into the official religion of the empire (20).

Yoder was quite clear that he was arguing for a view which ran counter to normal intuitions and habits, to first century and twentieth century culture (see §7.2.2.1). The

professional purveyor of access to the divine (priest, shaman) was represented in religions of all kinds, but "is part of the fallen nature of things, a universal anthropological constant underlying [a] great variet[y] of form."[53] The flaw at the heart of "the ministry" as an institution was sacerdotal privilege with its understanding of "the minister" as set apart from the rest of the people. Here Yoder took up the anti-religious critique of biblical faith which had been expounded by Barth, Bonhoeffer and Ellul.

> The desire to let someone else, who is better at it, do our religious articulation for us, to speak to us words of reprimand and of comfort, to meet our needs for having our hands held or our cosmos held together - these are part of that perennial religious appetite.[54]

This has made me ponder the relation between the response of the people of Israel to YHWH's words on Mt. Sinai, addressed to Moses, "You speak to us and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die," (Exod 20:19; cf., Deut 5:24-7) and Paul's insistence upon the receipt of the Spirit by the Galatians (Gal 3:2-3; 4:6-7). It seems that in ancient Israel the Spirit of God was available only to a few leaders some of the time (Num 11:25; cf., Judg 11:29, etc.), but from Pentecost the gift of the Holy Spirit was given to all disciples of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38). The church's reversion to the human priest as intermediary and particular bearer of the Spirit has echoes of Israel's adoption of a human king (1 Sam 8:4-9). In the history of the church it has been acceded to by God, but it has generally amounted to a displacement of Jesus as priest and giver of the Spirit.

It is precisely because the ultimate leadership of the church lies with the risen and ascended Christ, mediated by the presence of the Spirit, that human leadership is limited in power (though not without value). Where the church has lost its dependence upon the power of the Spirit present in all its members, and confined his presence to particular human leaders, it has been in danger of turning these leaders into Jesus-substitutes - whether in the form of clergy and pope or charismatic wonder-worker and prophet. As I have reflected upon my own years in ordained ministry I have to agree with Yoder's observation that "The professional religionist, whatever his intentions and whatever his

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[53] Yoder, *Body Politics*, 55.
[54] Yoder, "The One and the Many" (1990), 62.

theology, is a standing temptation for his "flock" to fall back into spiritual second-handedness." (104)

Yoder's procedure here was to reject the model of priesthood on theological grounds derived from the New Testament, and then to identify the subsequent reintroduction of the priestly model as a reversion to conventional religiosity (or the partial vision of the Old Testament) in an inappropriate cultural accommodation. He intended his critique to apply to the Protestant notion of clergy as much as any other. For the religious specialist was not confined to the churches of the episcopal tradition: "Even groups which [hold] no theology for ordination treat the "reverend" or "brother" as if his office were quasi-sacramental." (20) I believe that it is significant that even within the Roman Catholic Church the clergy-laity divide is being subjected to criticism based upon appeal to the New Testament.[55]

7.2.2.1 Leadership as a profession in the modern church

Allied to Yoder's description of the Patristic church's re-aquisition of the religious specialist was his description of how more recent ministry in the church had come to be defined in terms of a profession. (71-83) The modern "pastoral role"

> involves gathering together under the responsibility of one person many diverse tasks which in the New Testament church would have been widely shared among numerous persons, perhaps each of them less competent to do the whole job, but each of them probably more competent to do his or her one share than the average recent seminary graduate would be to handle everything. (74)

Yoder considered eight crucial marks of the clergy as a profession which showed how such a conception constricted, distorted or discouraged true Christian ministry. (75-81)

1. A professional does full-time work with full financial support.
2. A professional has a clearly definable, quasi-unique function.

These characteristics tend to telescope or homogenize various possible gifts and roles

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[55] See the recent work of Herbert Haag, *Clergy & Laity: Did Jesus Want a Two-Tier Church?*, trans. Robert Nowell (Tunbridge Wells, Kent: Burns & Oates, 1997).

into one "jack of all trades," and to prevent him recognising the validity of other's ministries who are not professional. (75)

3. The professional is most naturally thought of as serving a total population, society as a whole, or any individual from within it (as in the case of a lawyer or doctor).

4. The professional must not be guided by theological or moral commitments which keep him or her from rendering the kind of services which the public will want.

These characteristics reveal the professional adoption of the ideological common denominator of the total community, and this seriously interferes with the calling of Christian ministry to be true to the church as a minority and prophetically disturbing of wider society. (75-6)

5. The professional role individualizes its bearer but also the client and his problems.

6. The standards of the professional, being specialized, are measured by his peers rather than his clientele.

Here it becomes clear that the concept of profession must be broken and remolded if it is to serve the believer's church, since her servants must, at least at key points, be defined by the values of the minority and not by the consensus of the larger society. A pastor's vision of his task must be oriented to the specific congregation which he serves. (76-8)

7. The services of professionals are largely interchangeable, and so they become mobile.

To the extent that the professional "job description" leaves out the peculiarities of the individual personality, it weakens the authenticity of giftedness. In the New Testament ministry arises out of the congregation where the individual is known socially. Mobility weakens the congregation's confidence in the minister and makes it possible for a minister to keep moving rather than face problems or his own weaknesses. (78-9)

8. The professional discourages amateurism.

The Pauline body concept insists that each task can be better done by its own bearer.

Further, to involve more people draws on a full range of ability, increases member's commitment, and spreads the load. (79-81)

These sociological observations concerning the modern church amounted to a criticism of the assimilation to models of leadership common in surrounding culture to the detriment of a specific feature of the original church vision. They enabled Yoder to maintain his theological vision of shared ministry and shared leadership in the church.

7.2.3 Criticism of the Socio-Theological Model of Monarchy

Yoder's critique of the dominance of the clerical model of church leadership was augmented by his suspicion that it had assimilated royal overtones, for he wrote of "clerical monarchy."[56] Now the term "monarchical episcopate" as often used[57] to describe the episcopacy of Ignatius of Antioch, "is a misnomer," according to the Roman Catholic theologian, Terence Nichols.

> For in the early Church the bishops did not rule the laity like kings. They were usually elected by the people (or sometimes by the presbyters), could be deposed by them, and customarily consulted both the presbyters and the people in making their decisions. They were ordained by other bishops of the same region.[58]

However, Nichols shows that in the medieval period the participatory model of hierarchy in the church was displaced by a command model, under the influence of Hellenistic concepts of divine monarchy which came to be applied to the emperor. During the years 1046-1122 the long struggle between the popes and the German emperors over the investiture and control of bishops eventuated in the freedom of the church from lay nobility, but was the beginning of a papal monarchy.[59] Ultramontanism, a movement to centralize Catholic authority and power in the papacy, expanded in the nineteenth century, and even after Vatican II, although there is far more participation at the local

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[56] Yoder, *The Fullness of Christ*, 37. Unattributed page references from here on in this subsection are to this work.
[57] Peter Toon so used it, s.v. "Bishop" *NIDCC*, 133. Kevin Giles uses the term with reference to the second century in his article "Church Order, Government" in *DLNT*, 225.
[58] Terence L. Nichols, *That All May Be One: Hierarchy and Participation in the Church* (Collegeville, Min.: Liturgical, 1997), 99.
[59] Ibid., 133-142.

level, Rome itself "remains captive to the monarchical ideology that the pope makes the decisions."[60] With such a notion of papacy in place, it is not surprising that bishops with a large concentration of power in their hands should assume something of a monarchical ethos.

In §5.2.3 I showed that Yoder believed that Israel's adoption of human monarchy had been a negative step, and in §5.2.4 that a canonical approach to the Scriptures confirms his view, so that the Davidic covenant came to be applied to the whole people after the exile. It may be that in this way Israel's traditions came to the Exodus vision of the people as a "priestly kingdom" (Exod 19:6, cf., 1 Pet 2:9). Any suggestion of a conventional monarchical tinge in the exercise of authority in the church is without warrant. It was appropriate that Yoder should emphasize the transformative notion of royal leadership proclaimed to the exiles.

> If there is in fact a "centre" from which on biblical grounds one should seek to illuminate and orient all of the ministries of the community, it would have to be the notion of servanthood itself. The flip side of the word "lay" having come to mean "uninvolved" is the way the word "minister," which originally, etymologically, must mean "servant," has come to mean "ruler."
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> From the beginning it was not so. The beginning of the defining of churchly roles as service was the ancient near eastern usage according to which the human king was the servant of the divine King. The "Suffering Servant Songs" of Isaiah 42-53 reflect this usage, but transform it by applying it to the human servant's fate of defeat and suffering. (66-67)

Yoder's critique of the church's ministry was derived from the true servanthood of Jesus: "I am among you as one who serves" (Lk 22:27; cf., Matt 20:25; Mk 10:42f).[61] He used the concept of service to ask questions about social process.

> It is this redefinition of Jesus' role as serving not only God but his disciples, whom he now calls "friends" and "brothers," which Jesus gives the disciples as model for their own roles, when they are still thinking about "which of them would be the greatest" (according to Luke and John) in a eucharistic setting. By thus defining the role of the Anointed he redefines the very meaning of role.
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> The notion that God himself has renounced rule for servanthood and calls us to do the same (Phil 2:5-11) is paradoxically a powerful thought. It explodes the categories with which we think about social process. That is why one of

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[60] Ibid., 250.

[61] Yoder often made this appeal, e.g., *The Politics of Jesus*, 38f; *The Royal Priesthood*, 95.

> Satan's most ordinary tricks is to let us continue to use the language of serving as euphemism for ruling. (67)

7.2.4 Advocacy of the Socio-Historical Model of the Synagogue

Where Yoder rejected the priesthood model (with its temple associations) as the way to understand leadership in the Christian community, he was drawn to the alternative Jewish model of the synagogue. I will begin by considering the current state of the historical argument concerning the synagogue hypothesis, as presented by James T. Burtchaell,[62] before discussing Yoder's version of it. The twentieth century (Sohm) consensus that Paul (and the New Testament as a whole) was unconcerned about recognised church leadership (see above $7.2.1) had not done justice to the evidence of the New Testament itself, since in one of his earliest letters Paul referred to a group of diligent leaders (1 Thess 5:12f), and similar concerns were mentioned in several other letters (Rom 12:8; 1 Cor 16:15f; Phil 1:1). Significant reference to leaders was made in Hebrews (13:7, 17, 24), and to elders in James (5:14) and 1 Peter (5:1-5). Burtchaell identified a key theological presupposition held within this consensus; that Jesus had radically broken away from Israel in forming his community. He argued that this presupposition was fed by the Lutheran rejection of a Judaism characterized by law. (183-4) This analysis of the former consensus fits with the re-evaluation of Paul of the last twenty years which seeks to recover from the antipathy to Judaism which has tended to dominate New Testament scholarship.[63]

Burtchaell proposed an alternative hypothesis; "It is impossible to understand primitive Christian worship unless in continuity with Jewish worship." (190) This led him to explore how community organization among the earliest Christians might be illuminated by comparison with the typical pattern of synagogue organization during the same period. Although there were some clear differences between the synagogues and churches, especially in the lack of certain officials and dignitaries,[64] in many ways there

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[62] Burtchaell, *From Synagogue to Church* (see note 29 above), 183f. Unattributed page references in this subsection refer to this work.

[63] See above $5.3.2 (note 88).

[64] Burtchaell noted the absence of a senior elder = *gerousiarchês*, of levitical priests, and of the notables =

was a continuity of organization between the two communities. Thus, he argued, the leaders or bishops who became dominant in the sub-apostolic period had been in existence all along "as a carry over of the traditional order." But he accounted for their low profile in the New Testament writings by maintaining that "they were not the seat of the aboriginal church's vitality" (349).

> One is obliged to infer that in the infancy and first youth of the Christian fellowship, neither the elders nor their chairman nor the deacons *led* the communities. They were "not where the action was." Men and women known as apostles and prophets; men and women who carried no titles but whose activist zeal was accredited by the same divine fire: these were the ones to whom believers most notably deferred. The people who bore most powerfully in their persons the force of divine conviction and transformative impetus were people who, without community screening or authorization, did God's work. They spoke with authority. But that does not mean that they presided. (350)

Burtchaell's hypothesis has been severely criticised by Alastair Campbell in his important study of *The Elders*.[65] Campbell's criticism of Burtchaell's handling of evidence from the New Testament and the Didache is damaging. His historical study of the elders shows that they were held in honour in the first Christian communities, and this undermines Burtchaell's dubious distinction between presiding and leading. It seems that Burtchaell's particular historical evidence for the synagogue as a model for the church and its leadership is unconvincing.[66] However, the more general case that synagogue models of local self-government and weekly assemblies formed the point of departure for Christian assemblies continues to hold, even if new theological and practical terminology was adopted for them.[67]

Turning now to Yoder's estimate of the synagogue; he identified a number of culturally unique traits of second temple Judaism contributing to a faith community based in the synagogue which amounted to "something qualitatively new in the history of

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archontes (340).

[65] Alastair Campbell, *The Elders: Seniority Within Earliest Christianity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994).

[66] For another criticism of Burtchaell's methodology see Ascough, *Pauline Churches*, 21-3.

[67] Many scholars take this position. See Kevin Giles, "Church Order, Government," *DLNT*, 221. Brad Blue's recent work on "The Influence of Jewish Worship on Luke's Presentation of the Early Church" in *Witness to the Gospel:The Theology of Acts*, edd. I. Howard Marshall & David Peterson (Grand Rapids, Mi. & Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998), 473-497, concludes: "The church, then, was a Christian synagogue." (497)

religions." This cultural novelty was capable of enormous flexibility, but was marked by the following features:

* The Torah, the reading and singing of which formed its primary vehicle of identity definition.
* The synagogue, a decentralized, self-sustaining, nonsacerdotal form of local community life.
* The rabbinate, a nonsacerdotal, non-hierchical, non-violent leadership, validated by their identification with the Torah.[68]

By these means, Jewish identity was independent of a central administration and enabled to adapt to changing circumstances. Yoder saw a great deal of continuity between the social organization of the synagogue and that of the early church; it began with very similar sociological expressions, but gradually abandoned them or transformed them into institutions shaped by Roman culture. In principle the issues raised by the radical reformers of the 16th century were transpositions of the old Jewish identity agenda, restated as an intra-Christian critique: anticlericalism, anticentralism, warning against antinomianism, rejection of national-governmental control of the churches.[69] Thus he argued that the social organization (and ethics) of the synagogue was appropriated by the early church and subsequently lost as various elements of temple religion were reappropriated in later centuries.[70]

Yet can such a close comparison between the synagogues and the early churches be drawn? The most important reservations about the synagogue hypothesis turn on the theological language of the New Testament. The usage of ἐκκλησία rather than συναγογή may reflect a deliberate differentiation from the established Jewish gatherings, and perhaps recalls the ancient assembly (*qahal*) of Israel.[71] The Jewish

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[68] Yoder, "The Jewish Christian Schism...," 138; see also *For the Nations*, 58, 71n48.
[69] Yoder, "The Jewish Christian Schism...," 77.
[70] A comparison can be made with the historical study of Christianity up to the fourth century by Liberation Theologian, Eduardo Hoornaert, *The Memory of the Christian People*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Tunbridge Wells, Kent: Burns & Oates, 1989). He writes, "Everything in original Christianity bears the stamp of the synagogue." (142)
[71] For a discussion of the issues, see Kevin Giles, "The Meaning of the Word *Ekklēsia*: Old Testament and Intertestamental Background," excursus 1 of *What on Earth is the Church?: A Biblical and Theological Enquiry* (London: SPCK, 1995), 230-40.

institutions which functioned as types of the church were the temple (1 Cor 3:16-7; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21; cf., spiritual house, 1 Pet 2:4) or domestic house/household (1 Tim 3:15).[72]

There is more at stake here than terminology. Robert Banks has argued that whereas the various first-century Jewish communities were centred around the Scriptures, and Hellenistic religious associations centred primarily around a cult, according to Paul's understanding participation in the Christian communities centered primarily around fellowship.

> This means that the focal point of reference for Paul's communities is neither a book nor a rite, neither a code nor a cult, but a set of relationships. God primarily communicates to them, not through the written word and tradition or mystical experience and cultic activity, but through one another. Certainly fellowship is not altogether lacking in these other groups, and the Old Testament scriptures and various corporate activities are present in the Pauline churches. But a real difference lies at the heart of their respective gatherings.[73]

Given all the varieties of Judaism and of cultic activity in the pagan world, this may strike the reader as a rather crude typology, yet it does capture a central point about religious experience in Paul's churches. The life of the Spirit was manifested in a set of relationships of a particular quality.

Now I began to describe Yoder's ecclesiology in chapter 3 by focusing on the new community centred around Jesus. Here is one of his key statements on the subject: "Jesus created around himself a society like no other society mankind had ever seen," and he went on to characterise its novelty in terms of its voluntary, socially mixed membership, with a new way of life springing from a different exercise of power.[74] Further, we have seen in chapter 6 that Yoder understood the Christian community as the locus of the Spirit, so that it was not focused on the Scriptures as such. On these two counts he was

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[72] Douglas Powell, in the course of advocating the priestly model of church leadership, argued that "in so far as the Christian institute of the presbyterate was consciously formed upon Jewish models, these are not 'synagogue-elders' but the Mosaic presbyters of the Pentateuch." ("Ordo Presbyterii," 304) But it needs to be asked how the role of the elder can be identified with the role of the priest, for in ancient Israel these were clearly different.

[73] Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community* (Peabody, Ma.: Hendrickson, 1994²), 108.

[74] Yoder, "The Original Revolution," in *For the Nations*, 175. Even in this description Yoder included aspects of the post-Pentecost church, such as inclusion of Jews and gentiles.

effectively in agreement with Banks. So we are faced with a tension between Yoder's suggestion of continuity of social organization between the synagogue and the early church, and discontinuity in his description of religious experience between the synagogue compared with that in the new community of the Spirit. This was a tension (though not a contradiction) which Yoder seems not to have recognised; he certainly did not address it.

The discontinuity in religious experience (the gift of the Spirit to all believers) explains why certain theological terminology was adopted for the church which recalled the temple rather than the synagogue.[75] It was a small step from recognising the church as the dwelling place of God's Spirit (God's house) to speaking in terms of God's household (the connection went back to 2 Sam 7:4-11). Thus, the household became a major theological image for the church, but it retained sociological overtones which were in continuity with the synagogue. For as Howard Clark Kee has written, "In the earlier stages, the synagogues were informal and spontaneous in origin. In Palestine and in the diaspora, Jews gathered in private homes or, if space was not adequate, in public halls."[76] In other words, the sociological dimension of the household image was much the same as the sociology of the early synagogue, but the theological dimension of the household image enabled it to express what in early Christianity transcended the religious experience of the synagogue.

Even if the synagogue was only one of a number of social institutions on offer as models for the church, and not such a key to understanding the sociology of the early church as Burtchaell and Yoder argued, the church today could learn from the Jewish

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[75] It is significant that the theophanic accounts of the arrival of YHWH's glory in the tabernacle (Exod 40:34-5) and the temple (1 Kgs 8:10-11), which are matched by Ezekiel's vision of YHWH's departure from the temple (Ezek 8-11), find no counterpart in the account of the dedication of the rebuilt temple (Ezra 6:16-18). It is as though there was a hiatus before the coming of the Spirit upon the body of Jesus (in baptism) and subsequently upon the church.

[76] Howard Clark Kee, *Who are the People of God?*, 93-4. Kee has argued that there is no evidence for formal Jewish synagogues in the first century AD, thus impugning Luke's portrayal of Paul's visits to synagogues in Acts, but this view has been challenged. Among those who disagree is Lee I. Levine who argues that the synagogue was a centre not simply for worship, but for many aspects of communal activity in "The Nature and Origin of the Palestinian Synagogue Reconsidered," *JBL* 115/3 (1996), 425-48. For a brief summary of the debate see Ascough, 13-14. For more extensive discussion see Heather A. McKay, "Ancient Synagogues: The Continuing Dialectic Between Two Major Views," *CRBS* 6 (1998), 103-142.

household which has proved so pivotal in the survival of Judaism down the centuries. After the scattering of the Jewish nation into the *galut*, the rabbis began to refer to the home as a small sanctuary or miniature temple; the home was more important than the synagogue.[77] So I now turn to a discussion of the household model for the church, a model which combines sociological and theological dimensions, a model which Yoder did not discuss, though it is congenial to his overall position.

7.2.5 An Alternative: The Socio-Theological Model of the Household

There can be little doubt that the household was an important model for theological understanding of the church in the early years.[78] Robert Banks wrote twenty years ago:

> Although in recent years Paul's metaphors for community have been subjected to quite intense study, especially his description of it as a "body," his application of "household" or "family" terminology has all too often been overlooked or only mentioned in passing. This presumably stems from the fact that terms like *oikeioi*, "household," occur so rarely in the Pauline writings. But, alongside this term, a number of related expressions are present that must be taken into account. So numerous are these, and so frequently do they appear, that the comparison of the Christian community with a "family" must be regarded as the most significant metaphorical usage of all.[79]

I referred earlier to Alastair Campbell's critique of the synagogue hypothesis. The most significant aspect of his work is his grasp of the importance in early Christianity of the household:[80]

> the household was more than a model; it was the matrix of the new congregation. We are explicitly and repeatedly told of the churches' meeting in

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[77] See Marvin Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: The Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1989), 214-7.

[78] Ascough's historical approach in *Pauline Churches?* has caused him to underplay the theological significance of the household model. For an extensive recent treatment of the socio-historical significance of the household for the early churches, see Carolyn Osiek & David L. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* (Louisville, Ken.: Westminster John Knox, 1997).

[79] Banks, *Paul's Idea* (see note 73 above), 48-9. The two most obvious manifestations of this metaphor are the claim to be children of God (or to have God as Father) through the Spirit (Jn 1:12; 20:17; Rom 1:7; 8:9-11, 14-17, 19, 29; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:4; 3:26; 4:6-7; Eph 1:2; 4:6; 5:1; Phil 1:2; 4:20; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:3; 3:11-13; 2 Thess 1:1; 2:16; Phm :3; Heb 2:10; 12:7-8; 1 Pet 1:17; 1 Jn 3:1-2, 10; 5:1; Rev 21:7), and the frequent usage of the address, "brothers" (see the concordances). I explored the numerous aspects of this image in my M.A. dissertation, "The Household of God: The Hermeneutics of a Biblical Image" (unpublished, London Bible College, 1989).

[80] Campbell, *The Elders*, refers to extensive study of the household in the work of Filson, Banks, Elliott, Meeks, Theissen and others. Unattributed references in this subsection are to this work.

> someone's house. Burtchaell, of course, knows that the Christians used private houses, but he appears to see these simply as buildings, rather than as extended families with built in authority patterns of their own. (118)

I shall proceed by means of a detailed interaction with Campbell.[81]

Campbell argues that there are few references to people in official authority in Paul's earliest letters simply because the authority patterns of the household were implicitly in operation. Those in whose houses the churches met provided patronage and protection; they would have been looked to for leadership. As time went by and the number of house churches in a city grew, practical necessity would have led to division of labour and the use of explicit authority language. The household environment continued to influence thinking about the church, as can be observed in the *Haustafeln* in Colossians and Ephesians and household language in the Pastoral letters. So Campbell makes his own proposal for understanding the institutionalization process;

> It is the household structure of the earliest churches which is both the factor that makes the calling of people 'the elders' inappropriate in the first generation, and inevitable in the second. (126)

A study of the elders in the book of Acts (which reflects the second generation of Christians) enables Campbell to argue that the early churches in Judea also met in homes and probably developed leadership in a similar way to Paul's churches (141-175).

This view of the development of authority patterns in the early church disposes of the previous consensus which opposed a charismatic understanding of ministry to institutional authority, and saw the Pastoral epistles as representing a merging of those two understandings. Campbell's view of the Pastorals is that they are pseudonymous and written at a time when the μονεπίσκοπος was in the process of becoming established, "not to effect an amalgamation of overseers and elders, but to legitimate the authority of the new overseer." (196). The same issue is reflected in the letters of 1 Clement and Ignatius. The former, Campbell thinks, resisted the μονεπίσκοπος, defending the

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[81] Several studies of the household church have been written, though Campbell's work is the most detailed in the area of leadership. It is interesting to compare Del Birkey's (Mennonite) positive evaluation, *The House Church: A Model for Renewing the Church* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald, 1988) with Vincent Branick's (Catholic) historical approach in *The House Church in the Writings of Paul* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1989).

influential elders which it had displaced; the latter sought to curb the independence of the elders and bring them under the authority of one man. (211-222)

Campbell's reconstruction of changes in church leadership as reflected in the Pastorals and beyond the New Testament is necessarily somewhat speculative. In particular the argument about the emerging μονεπίσκοπος in the Pastorals depends upon their being post-Pauline. But more significantly, Campbell's study, which he believes is the fruit of "disinterested research" (*xiii*), is expressly "socio-historical in character" (5). Whilst his work illuminates the social context of elders in patriarchal societies, it must be asked whether his socio-historical approach has obscured important theological factors of which it cannot take account. The process of obscuration can be observed in Campbell's discussion of "The Fallacy of Idealism" (100-106).[82] He begins by making the obvious point that the principles we see Paul enunciating in his letters cannot do duty as descriptions of his churches. He appeals to Berger and Luckman[83] to establish that there is a continual dialectic between theological ideas and social realities, so that actual church situations force their creators to formulate new ideas to explain and control them. So far this is fairly unremarkable, but then the move is made to attribute the 'new ideas' of the creator entirely to the social interaction between him and the way things are in the church:

> when Paul says that God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers... The chaotic reality of the Corinthian church is reacting upon its creator to produce a new and powerful idea. In the same way, Paul's idea of the church as the body of Christ is more a response to the reality of the Corinthian church than the idea that brought it into being. (101)

Campbell has happily adopted the standpoint of the sociology of knowledge and endorses Holmberg's assertion that "Social life is *determined* by social factors, including the opinions and consequently the theology of the actors."[84] But this is to allow supremacy in the field of knowledge to social theory, something which theology worth

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[82] This is a phrase which was coined by Bengt Holmberg,*Paul and Power* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1978), 205.
[83] Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Harmondsworth, Middx.: Penguin, 1967).
[84] Holmberg, *Paul and Power*, 205f, my emphasis.

its name cannot allow.[85] Of course, Paul's formulation of ideas in his letters (which may or may not have been new to their recipients) was carefully chosen to address the particular realities of the churches which he had in mind. But the ideas themselves, or rather the vision of the church, upon which he drew in writing, Paul attributed to God and to his experience of Christ, and to the Scriptures (e.g., 1 Cor 10:6-13). This is why the Christian church has continued to regard Paul's epistles as divine revelation.

Campbell understands the emergence of the elders, being "recognized in virtue of their seniority, status and contribution to the church" and subsequently being appointed officially by departing missionaries (e.g., 170). But his emphasis upon the socio-historical comparison with elders generally in Jewish culture and Greco-Roman society means that he gives scant consideration to the qualifications which Christian leaders were required to have. Douglas Powell wrote of the authority of elders being "determined not by birth but by rebirth." However, the requirement for leadership was "not merely the length but also the quality of the conversion-life; not neophytes, but men full of the spirit and wisdom... or, as Irenaeus puts it, 'among whom exists that which is sound and blameless in conduct, and unadulterated and incorrupt in speech'."[86] Thus leadership in the early Christian churches was not determined by ordinary social status or economic circumstances, although these may have had some influence (a wealthy householder would be in a position to host a house church), but by Christian discipleship as demonstrated in behaviour.

Campbell's emphasis on the importance of the household is on target: it is a key image of the church in the New Testament, incorporating theological and sociological dimensions. Yet though Yoder would have agreed that the elders had a place in the life of the church, he would observe that Campbell operates with a conventional notion of authority which allocates it entirely to such a defined group, and thus misses the essential

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[85] See §3.4.2. Holmberg appears to have modified his earlier view, since he has more recently written, "sociological analysis gets hold of new and important aspects of early Christian reality, but seems incapable of encompassing in its analysis the faith dimension that was unique and existentially important for these Christians themselves." *Sociology and the New Testament; An Appraisal* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1990), 148f.

[86] Douglas Powell, "Ordo Presbyterii," 305, 311.

element of a shared social process on account of the common gift of the Spirit to all. Robert Banks, working with the household model has, I believe, expressed such a perception in his article on church government in Paul:

> For modern people questions of order and government are often of primary interest. Organization and leadership are central concerns in any democratic and bureaucratic-rational society. This is also the case in church life, which is more democratized and bureaucratic than in previous times. In our social and religious arrangements we prize order: it is not only a preoccupation but a virtue, not only a means but an end. We are also fascinated by the issue of leadership, with chains of command, lines of authority and so forth. As a result we are in constant danger of reading the priority we accord these matters into Paul's ideas about the church. He was certainly concerned that the church conduct itself in an orderly manner and that members were properly cared for and guided. But except where these were inadequate or threatened in some way, he says very little about them. For him they appear to be secondary rather than primary issues. Where more fundamental aspects of church life are given priority, church order and government should largely look after themselves.[87]

7.2.6 Conclusion

I find Yoder's decisions about the various models of leadership and its development in the early church persuasive up to a point. The key image of leadership must be that of servanthood, advocated and exemplified by Jesus, which forms a searing critique of endlessly recurring self-aggrandisement among church leaders. Yoder's emphasis upon the diaspora existence of Judaism as normative led him to emphasise the role of the synagogue, and continuity between the role of elders in the synagogue and early church. In socio-historical terms, this is broadly justified, though not in the specifics which Burtchaell suggested. However, Yoder failed to observe that it is the language of the household model which appears most often in the New Testament, enabling theological expression of the religious experience of the early Christians. I will explore leadership aspects of the household model further in the next section.

The emergence of the clergy-laity divide in the first half of the second century correlates with the growing rift between Christianity and Judaism. There seems to have been a connection between the thinking expressed in writings like *1 Clement*, which

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[87] Robert Banks, s.v. "Church Order and Government," *DPL*, 132.

resorted to the language of Old Testament priesthood for the clergy, and the understanding of Christianity as replacing the Jewish people in God's purposes. Instead of understanding itself as the embodiment of a new departure in God's purposes, which relinquished the former ethnic exclusivity of God's people without denying God's promises to the Jewish people, it is as though the church turned back to the old internal divisions (clergy/laity) even as it displaced the Jewish people from God's promises.

With the introduction of Christendom, the boundary around God's people was widened by making it approximate to birth within a "Christian nation," and Christianity became a conventional religion in many ways. Once the church lost its character as a community of specific allegiance to Jesus Christ, its elders were confirmed in a priestly capacity towards the wider populace.[88] The concentration of authority and ministry in the hands of the clergy was effectively a constriction of the Spirit and a reversal of eschatology. Office and authority became the prerogative of a highly institutionalized clergy. Even Protestant churches which repudiated certain aspects of this model of leadership failed to grasp its full implications. Yoder was calling the church to a recovery of the eschatological vision of the fullness of Christ which meant a plurality of leaders who served the community after the model of their Lord.

7.3 The Exercise of Authority within the Community

We have already considered the accusation of unrealizability that Yoder's ecclesiology has faced. Yoder maintained a vision of the church and its leadership alongside a fairly pragmatic willingness to engage with various Christian traditions in terms of their own traditions, yet he left some work to be done in terms of clarification as well as a whole

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[88] It seems that by the fourth century there was a coalescence in the church of two roles which Israel had kept separate (the leader of the community and the religious functionary). With the formation of Christendom, the bishop continued to represent continuity and order to his community, now understood to encompass the whole population of his diocese, though his relationship with lay rulers could be problematic. See John A. F. Thomson, *The Western Church in the Middle Ages* (London & New York: Arnold, 1998), chapter 4.

set of issues concerning implementation. I cannot attempt to deal with all of these at this juncture, but I shall make three proposals arising from what has been said so far.

Firstly, in \$7.1.1 I had occasion to note Yoder's repudiation of "hierarchy" while maintaining the need for leadership structure and so I seek to explore the notion of hierarchy further here. Secondly, I proposed that the model of household provided the writers of the New Testament with a theological means of describing their religious experience which went beyond that of the synagogue (\$7.2.5). Here I propose that it also provides a significant way to think about the exercise of authority in the community. Thirdly, I refer to Yoder's ecclesiology to discuss situations in which authority is abused within the church.

7.3.1 Hierarchy and the Characterization of the Church

Terence Nichols, writing from within the Catholic tradition, has sought to explore the notion of hierarchy in an illuminating critical study of the theology and historical exercise of church leadership.[89] Although he views the term positively, where Yoder did not, his perception of appropriate structure is much the same, for he insists that there must be some form of hierarchy in the church rather than egalitarianism. His creative contribution is to maintain that hierarchy is not necessarily dominative, sexist or static, (5-7) distinguishing between two forms of hierarchy: an authoritarian and oppressive form, in which power flows from the top down and lower members are constrained by force; and an inclusive and empowering form, in which influence flows from the members to the leaders as much as *vice-versa*.

> Whereas a command hierarchy is governed by an *authority of force or domination*, a participatory hierarchy is governed by what might be called an *authority of virtue*. 'Virtue' here is used in its widest sense as excellence in any practice or activity. (8)

Nichols argues that hierarchy in the church is grounded both in the ontological status of Christ and by appeal to the authority of Christ, but that distortions in conceptions of

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[89] Terence L. Nichols, "Hierarchy and the Church," *Pro Ecclesia*, IV/3 (1995) 281-300; and idem, *That All May Be One*, (see note 58 above). Unattributed page references from here on in this subsection are to the latter work.

ontological hierarchy likely create an ecclesial autocracy. (10-11) Two models of ontological hierarchy can be discerned, as with social hierarchy: command and participatory (12). A participatory model of God, which is the principal understanding of God in Scripture, while emphasizing ontological hierarchy, also emphasizes that humans can participate in God's own life. A command model of God, of which there are some elements in Scripture, entails a coercive and fearful relation between humans and God. (12) Now social and ontological hierarchy come together in the church, and the church is meant to be a hierarchical communion of love, not of dominance and command, in order to be a sacrament and sign of God's love in the world. With Catherine LaCugna and others, Nichols maintains that the development of a trinitarian understanding of God undercuts and opposes attempts to understand God's reign autocratically, or to erect an autocratic ecclesial structure. But he maintains that a trinitarian understanding of God favors a participatory hierarchy, rather than a non-hierarchical structure, as does LaCugna.[90]

Now there are flaws in Nichols reasoning. As he says, "the confession "Jesus is Lord" is foundational for believers, and submission to the will of Christ is essential for discipleship." (10) But in New Testament terms this submission to the authority of Christ is attributed to his exaltation by the Father after his death on the cross (Phil 2:6-11): ontological language is not explicit, as I argued in chapter 2. Secondly, the confession "Jesus is Lord" is uttered by all Christians, and places all members of the community on the same footing with regard to the head of the church; an ontological ecclesial hierarchy could only be legitimized if it could be shown that the leaders somehow have access to a more direct form of Jesus' lordship than the other members (either by way of succession or of some "hot-line" to God). However, the criteria for leadership in the New Testament are set first of all in terms of a lifestyle which conforms to Jesus' lordship, whatever official endorsement or claim to internal experience might be made. Later Nichols acknowledges that "the Spirit is given to the whole Church, not entirely to one individual. Therefore this hierarchy should be collegial and conciliar." (18)

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[90] Catherine LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity & Christian Life*, (San Francisco: Harper, 1991) 388-400.

Nichols has to admit that "genuine participatory hierarchy has been rare in Christian history." (14) I find his proposal of an understanding of church leadership in terms of an inclusive and empowering hierarchy helpful, but would submit that this should be grounded not in ontological appeals but in the characterization of the church in terms of its membership, as set out in chapter 3 above. This seems to me an essential move in order to ensure the proper human exercise of leadership and authority within the community. For, if the character of the church is fundamentally recognised in its leaders, then the function of the leaders must necessarily be theologically orientated to the preservation and flourishing of the leaders, whatever their commitment to "the flock" (considerable as it often is). Out of the best motives of maintaining and extending the church, they must retain their status since their ecclesiology tells them that they themselves constitute the church. This means that the institution of leadership is fundamentally conservative in the sense that it will be resistant to initiative and reluctant to accept criticism from among the people. Its notion of authority is such as to tend to elevate the leaders above the rest of the community, both in the minds of the leaders and of the community members.

But if the character of the church is recognised in the members of the community, then the function of the leaders must necessarily be theologically orientated to the community's interests. They may still be inclined to look to their own interests, but their best motives of maintaining and extending the church will direct them to edifying the community, since their ecclesiology tells them that the community constitutes the church. This means that the institution of leadership takes a servant posture towards the community; it encourages appropriate initiative from others within the community (in consultation with the whole community) and takes seriously criticism from among the members. Its notion of authority is such as to tend to immerse the leaders within the community, both in the minds of the leaders and the community members, such that the exhortation, direction, instruction, reproof, or discipline that they exercise is a model for all members of the community.

In order for the community to flourish, it needs good leadership and the proper exercise of authority. But in order for those in authority to have a true understanding of their role with regard to the community as servants rather than as set-apart holy men/women, confusion over the definition of the church must be resolved. Membership must be understood in terms of specific allegiance to Jesus Christ.

7.3.2 The Household Model and the Exercise of Authority

If church leadership is best understood in terms of a plurality of elders committed to the service of the community, forming a participatory hierarchy and exercising an authority of virtue, what light might be thrown on the responsible exercise of authority by the model of the household? In the Roman household the *paterfamilias* had full authority over the household, but the equivalent within the Christian household is God the Father, Jesus having a particular role over it (Heb 3:6), though prepared to call its human members "brothers and sisters" (Heb 2:11, 17). No human figure takes his role, nor is *paterfamilias*. All human leader figures exercise what authority they have by delegation. A significant emphasis given to such leaders is answerability to their master for their treatment of those in their care (the parable of the faithful servant, Matt 24:45-51), and for their acumen in the development of gifts (the parable of the talents, Matt 25:14-30).[91]

In order to pursue this subject fully I would need to address a series of unavoidable questions which arise from cultural aspects of the "household," such as:

* Is the conception of household which is used as a theological model in the New Testament general enough to encompass the variations of the institution in the ancient world (Jewish, Greek, Roman), or is more specification necessary?
* In the ancient household, who held power and what were the lines of communication?

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[91] For a helpful discussion of leadership and authority in Matthew's Gospel in terms of the household (though over-reliant on Weber), see Michael Crosby, *House of Disciples: Church, Economics and Justice in Matthew* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 95-125.

* How far can this ancient household translate into a contemporary world with its variety of households. Gender issues would be significant.

Such a large field cannot be satisfactorily be explored in this dissertation. However, I will make the following preliminary suggestions.

The responsibility of those with leadership authority is to ensure the development towards maturity of the whole household, through the example and modelling of the more mature members, through their teaching, encouragement and guidance of the less mature (Eph 4:11-16), and through their leadership of the whole community. Thus many who have no official role as an elder may have a significant responsibility for others in their care. The leaders will not assume all initiative, or keep all others in a dependent state in order to maintain their power and control. As older brothers or sisters, they make a significant contribution to the maturing process of the less mature.

This household understanding of the responsibility of some for others allows considerable flexibility. In some situations an elder might find himself appointed within a church which has few members of any maturity, and the difficulty of finding suitable fellow elders might be acute. In such a situation, a considerable amount of initiative might have to be be taken by this one person in order to ensure that dangers are avoided and healthy growth takes place for such community as there is. The problem with this approach would be that the strong exercise of leadership deemed necessary for an immature community could tend to self-perpetuate - unless it deliberately worked towards the maturity of members and modelled servant-like leadership. In other situations a leader might share initiative with the community as a whole because it has sufficient mature members who share the responsibility of elders. In the history of the church there have been many leaders who have abused their responsibility by preventing development towards maturity in others or by refusing to recognise it when it has occurred. This may have been due to their own immaturity or desire for power. It has often been because of the theology of church structure and ministry held by the church and the conventional expectations of the people concerned.

This issue is particularly acute for a church leader who is attracted to Yoder's ecclesiology and finds him or herself in a church whose members have conventional expectations of leadership and membership. How can a leader enable a church to move from a dependent consumption of ministry towards the vision of a shared ministry and congregational process of discerning the leadership of the Spirit? The answer must lie in reflection on the gradual development of maturity which parents and siblings slowly work towards in a healthy human family.

Such household imagery is appropriate to the eschatological tension of the church because it expresses the interrelations within the human members which can change and develop over time in relation to the purposes of the One to whom the household belongs. I believe that this particular New Testament image is more helpful when thinking about leadership than the organic image of the body developed in 1 Cor 12,[92], since there Christ is the head and thus the role of human leaders is not incorporated within that image. It is more conducive to the goal of maturity for all than the pastor-flock image (1 Pet 5:1-5; John 21:15-17; Acts 20:28).[93] The household model has the capacity to provide a way of thinking about leadership within the church which avoids the attempt to make it analogous to inner-trinitarian relationships, and to maintain emphasis upon the rule of Christ to whom leaders are accountable.

7.3.3 The Abuse of Authority in the Church

In view of the sad possibility of abuse of authority in the church, how might an ecclesiology such as Yoder's guide response? He did not address this issue, but I believe that some features of his ecclesiology can be applied to such difficult situations (from §4.1.1 and §5.3.2).

The first recourse would be to the conflict-resolving process. Human leaders are not perfect, and by encouraging people who might be in disagreement with them to seek a genuine effort at face-to-face resolution of differences, leaders should encourage a

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[92] The image of the church as the body, with Christ as its head, is used to express development towards maturity in Eph 4:11-16, but gifted leaders remain Christ's gifts to the church.
[93] On this image see C. S. Keener, s.v. "Shepherd, Flock" *DLNT*, 1090-3.

process which can head off many situations which might otherwise develop into destructive conflict. The worst situation that can arise, though, is that faced by members who work hard to understand and support a leader who exercises authority in a harsh or defensive manner, rebuffing their attempts to employ conflict resolution. In a church with a plural leadership, the possibility of mutual admonition within the group of leaders is intrinsic. Yet, even in such a situation, a member might be faced with one (or perhaps more) leader exercising authority in a way perceived as abusive of their authority.

One response might be that characterized by Yoder as "revolutionary subordination." His insistence that "To accept subordination within the framework of things as they are is not to grant the inferiority in moral or personal value of the subordinate party"[94] could be used as an argument for a significant degree of subordination to church leaders with whom a member (or even many members) might not agree. Yet, one aspect of Yoder's argument for this approach was Paul's instructions to those in conventional positions of authority to use authority in a loving, constructive way. So that if a member were expected to be subordinate, a leader would be expected to behave in a gentle and empowering manner.

However, Yoder's "revolutionary subordination" ethic was worked out within the New Testament in respect of households. It was not applied to the situation in which Peter had drawn back from table fellowship with Gentiles, thus "acting inconsistently with the truth of the gospel." (Gal 2:11-14). Where the social form of the church as a "new and inexplicable kind of community of Jews and Gentiles" was threatened,[95] Paul was compelled to engage in public confrontation with a fellow leader. Although Paul's role as an apostle is not replicated in the church of today, his various approaches to situations of conflict are instructive concerning responses to varying degrees of perceived dispute in the church, both for those who have leadership responsibility and for those who have authority exercised over them.

I would conclude that in some situations the issues might be so close to the heart and reputation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that those with allegiance to him must be

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[94] Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 181.
[95] Ibid., 216.

prepared to confront those involved in a public way, even those who may be in authority over them.

8. Conclusion

The Christian church in Europe and North America experienced a dramatic numerical decline during the twentieth century. At the beginning of the third millennium its choice of theological vision will impinge on its survival and growth, its faithfulness and mission, and will in large part depend on how it understands itself in relation to its past, its story. In terms of my argument in chapter 6, one option would be to maintain the vision of Christendom, believing that Christianity should and can be restored to conventional dominance in national life (whether or not this is given constitutional form). An alternative option is to reject the vision of Christendom on the ecclesiological grounds that a growing number of theologians have developed, among whom Yoder has been a significant voice. But also determinative will be the vision and practice of authority within the church.

In this final chapter I critically review Yoder's contribution to ecclesiology for the third millenium, and then summarise other contributions to the subject which have arisen in the course of my work.

8.1 Evaluating Yoder on Community and Authority

In §4.3 I provided a preliminary evaluation of three significant aspects of Yoder's characterization of the church. Here I begin with a brief recapitulation of a number of criticisms of Yoder's work which have emerged in the previous chapters. I then review the systematic emphases which informed his ecclesiology. Finally, I sum up Yoder's vision of the interplay of authority and community in the church.

8.1.1 Specific Criticisms

Despite Yoder's valid point about his commandeering of such words as "human *iustitia*" (as discussed in §3.3.2), I have found a number of places where his choice of words to

express his ideas are imprecise, and sometimes these have meant that he has been misconstrued.[1] In §5.3.2 I was largely in agreement with Yoder's treatment of revolutionary subordination, but found one aspect of his discussion in need of further treatment: the relation between what he isolated as two strands of teaching in the New Testament, the one called "revolutionary subordination" and the other more obviously liberating. A minor point which I found unconvincing was his view of the Pastoral letters as "early" (§7.2.1.1)

More significantly, I found a tension between his denial that "a model pastoral method" could be derived from the Gospels and his affirmation that "the shape of the people of God does matter. Medium and message cannot be divorced." (§6.3.1). The denial was based on the absence of specific biblical mandates and made in the service of an ethical emphasis, but the ecclesiological point was more general and fundamental to Yoder's whole ecclesiology. I expressed the opinion (in §4.3.1) that there are significant church practices amenable to socio-theological exploration, such as discipleship, mentoring and apprenticeship, to which he did not attend.

In §7.2.4 I identified a tension between Yoder's emphasis on the sociological model of the synagogue for the early church and his insistence on the novelty of the community centred around Jesus and expressed in the early church. This was not a tension which is intrinsically unresolvable, but Yoder did not recognise or resolve it. The fact that he did not make significant reference to the household model of the church in the New Testament indicates that he did not consider it a significant theological resource.

Thus there are several weaknesses in details of Yoder's ecclesiology, though neither individually nor accumulatively do they amount to major problems. I have been able to indicate how many of them can be resolved.

8.1.2 Systematic Theological Balance

If "the church precedes the world epistemologically," then ecclesiology must take a central place in systematic theology. At the conclusion of §2.1.4 I maintained that

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[1] I had reason to comment on the following: "historicism" (§2.2.3); "real" (§3.1.3); "history" (§3.4.2); "anti-hierarchical" (§7.1.1).

ecclesiology should be pursued not by the route of ontology but by the search for systematic theological balance which reflects the Catholic Christian tradition under the critical control of Scripture. So what of Yoder's ecclesiology in these terms?

Yoder's work has been criticised for a lack of pneumatology (I particularly noted Gunton on this in §2.1). Yet it is now clear that even his view of history was pneumatologically informed (§5.1). The central theological issue in ecclesiology which he highlighted was that of a twin emphasis upon Christology and pneumatology. By insisting that discussions of ecclesiology focus upon membership of the church rather than on its leadership, he was able to regain the teaching of the New Testament that the Holy Spirit is given to all who follow Jesus Christ, submitting themselves to the discipline of the church whose Lord is Jesus. Whilst leadership was important in the church, its practitioners should not be understood as a specially endowed elite, set apart from a laity. Such an understanding both interfered with the working of the Spirit in a variety of ministries in the whole body, and amounted to a usurpation of the rule of Christ in the church. The effect of the introduction of the division between clergy and laity had been to distort the New Testament understanding of baptismal ordination and the gift of the Spirit.

This insistence on the role of the Spirit was a recovery of the eschatological nature of the church which had been confused, at least partly by the legacy of Augustine. The notion of the invisible church had facilitated the toleration of mediocrity inevitable in Christendom. In §3.3.2 I considered Nigel Wright's criticism of Yoder's view of the church's relation to the state. I believe that the fuller ecclesiology which I have been able to present in chapters 5 and 6 endorses Yoder's view of Constantinianism, and thus reinforces my doubts concerning Wright's optimistic view of the state.

In the second half of the twentieth century a large number of theologians sought to re-evaluate the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, and some have pointed to the experiences of the Jewish people in exile and dispersion as a model for the church following the demise of Christendom. In chapter 5 we saw that Yoder worked out this model in some detail, but in addition his study of the Jewish-Christian schism in the

early centuries of the church illuminates the process of change which made the Christendom accommodation possible. He was lecturing in this area in 1977, well before most of the significant studies in this field of the 1990s. It seems to me that if the current willingness of Christians to repent of anti-Jewish attitudes is to have a significant impact on the self-understanding of the church, there must follow a Yoder-like re-evaluation of early church history. The argument for renewed appreciation for the tradition of the Fathers among the Free Churches must be supplemented with a recognition that the tradition did not begin with Jesus' followers, but with Abraham.

8.1.3 The Relationship between Community and Authority

How might I sum up Yoder's understanding of the relationship between community and authority in the Christian church? What authority there is in the church is that of Christ, for Christ is the head of the church. This authority is not passed on to a privileged few who symbolise Christ to a submissive laity. But by the gift of the Spirit to all confessing Christians, the authority of Christ, is exercised through and by the whole community. Thus from time to time any member may admonish another in the spirit of reconciliation, and decisions may be made using a corporate process. Within the community the presence of the Holy Spirit will generate a variety of gifts for the mutual upbuilding and maturity of all, and some of these will be gifts of leadership. Leadership within the Christian community, though, will be unlike that found outside the church. It will be practised in a distinctive way: it will follow the servant model of Jesus, and it will be open to the working of the Spirit through any member of the church. It will be plural and conciliar, rather than singular and papal.

Yoder's confessional understanding of the church enabled him to avoid the charge of individualism and anarchy, but it also envisaged a much more dynamic community than that found in most churches. His emphasis upon particular practices which require a higher degree of human conversation and mutual interaction moved ecclesiology from theory to engage reality. This mutual interaction between people who would not normally associate with each other because of nationality, class, or other

divisions, would be marked by conflict and would require a commitment to reconciliation which embodies the Gospel of Christ. Yoder's eschatological emphasis upon both Christology and pneumatology explains the counter-intuitive and counter-habitual pattern of social process for which he called.[2] He convinced me that conflict resolution was central among the practices which go to make up the character of the church.

8.2 A Summary of Contributions to Ecclesiology

I identify what has emerged as the core issue in ecclesiology and then summarise specific details which have emerged in the course of my treatment of Yoder's work.

8.2.1 Identifying the Core Issue of Ecclesiology

I set out to discover an ecclesiology which gave proper place to the significance of the church as a community, and posed the issue in terms of the relationship between community and the exercise of authority within it. It has become evident that the core issue of ecclesiology is: who makes up the church - leaders or members?[3] This is the core issue of ecclesiology because it is fundamental to the rejection of the Christendom model, but also because it must inform the exercise of authority in the church.

From its inception the church has stood within its Jewish heritage. Reflection upon the Jewish heritage of the church strengthens the case for defining the church in terms of its membership rather than its leaders. The historical reasons for the adoption of a characterization of the church in terms of its leaders are understandable, even laudable - for the intention was to preserve the church in its allegiance to its Lord. But in order that the church might become the community which bears witness to the conflict-resolving gospel of Christ through the power of the Spirit given to all members, leaders must put themselves at the service of the community, and allow the church its true

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[2] Yoder, *Body Politics*, 47.

[3] However, the church is not properly characterized until both members and leaders engage in a set of practices which typify the church's embodiment of the gospel.

characterization according to the specific allegiance of its members to Jesus Christ its Lord.

8.2.2 Specific Details

I have shown that Gunton's call for an ecclesial ontology (§2.1) is unnecessary. It solves none of the debates about ecclesial polity, and instead a narrative approach (such as Yoder advocated) allows Scripture to speak to the church afresh. The main issue is one of ecclesial identity rather than ecclesial ontology. Following Baukham's suggestion I have organized Yoder's ecclesiology to demonstrate that ecclesial identity can be described in terms of character and tradition. The character of the community is expressed in its members' specific allegiance to the Lord of the Church and embodied in specific practices, while its tradition is rooted in Israel's story (§6.2.3), subject to Scriptural norm and prophetic critique.

I have proposed that the phenomenon which has confused the identity of the church, tied it too closely to the affairs of the empire (and to emerging nation-states after the Reformation), and rendered it ethically unfaithful, may be more helpfully labelled as "Christendom" than Constantinianism (§6.2.5).

I have proposed that the tension between socio-historical continuity with the synagogue and religious novelty in the Christian community can be resolved by use of the socio-theological image of the household (§7.2.5). This is a subject that has been extensively studied at a historical level, although much remains to be explored at a theological level (§7.3.2).

I have argued (§7.3.1) that some notion of hierarchy must inform leadership in the church, but that once it is recognised that the members make up the church, the theological place of leaders as servants of the whole community becomes evident. I have explored how Yoder's ecclesiology might inform response to abuse of authority in the church (§7.3.3).

In an era of fragmentation in church life which sociologists observe in wider society, I have suggested (§4.3.1) that arrangements such as discipleship, mentoring and

apprenticeship might be theologically developed in terms of a vital triad of ethics, spirituality and community.

I have claimed, following Yoder, that the central practice of the church is conflict resolution (§4.2.3). In my excursus (in chapter 4) I explored the theological themes undergirding the most extensive New Testament text concerning conflict resolution. My investigation into the Old Testament background of Matt 18:15-20 yielded a threefold theological warrant for the practice of conflict resolution:

* The character of God as forgiving, though disciplining.
* The saving action of God through the agency of the church.
* The presence of God's new creation.

I come, finally, to a simple but important conclusion, so far unstated: if the central church practice is conflict resolution, then a central responsibility of those who exercise authority within the church is to give themselves to conflict resolution within the church, and to enable the church to take what it learns of conflict resolution into the wider world.

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